

Nativism or Sectionalism:

A History of the Know-Nothing Party in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

The Know-Nothing party emerged as a national movement in 1854 as a secret political society. When it first appeared, it virtually ignored the pressing and explosive national issues, the sectional rivalries and the controversies over slavery, concentrating instead on one issue alone, nativism. Seeking to escape the tensions generated by the Compromise of 1850 and the debate over Kansas and Nebraska, it super-imposed a new issue over the others. Ultimately, it failed to divert the national attention from the controversy over slavery, and, in the North, it proved to be a transition party. Know-Nothingism dealt the final blow to a dying Whig party and gave birth to the more radically anti-slavery Republican party. Nativism was a temporary issue, embraced by men of all political backgrounds, but it was used as a transition by abolitionists and free soilers who were able to pave the way for the Republican party.

Nativism is an expression of nationalistic sentiment characterized by rejection of foreign customs, beliefs and peoples. Although America was settled by peoples of diverse national back-

grounds, it has, from time to time, shown suspicion, fear and distrust of immigrants, especially those of different ethnic and religious natures. Native American sentiment was quite common in the nineteenth century as Irish and German immigration increased gradually. Native American political parties were formed in parts of the South in the 1830's, and in the North the Antimasonic party showed considerable nativistic tendencies.¹ As immigration increased, nativism became stronger. With the Know-Nothings in 1854, nativism reached its highest pinnacle.

The emergence of the Know-Nothing party resulted from different factors in different geographic locations, but everywhere it existed it was a part of one of the strangest political eras in United States history. Its successes and failures in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania were typical in many ways of the nativist frenzy elsewhere; even though the pattern of nativist political fortunes varied somewhat in other parts of the nation, the history of Know-Nothingism in Lancaster represents well the political fluctuations and eccentricities of the years 1854 to 1856.

A circular distributed by the Know-Nothings in Lancaster during those years was likely to discuss no more than the completion of the Washington Monument, for that was a pressing issue to them. One paper given out by the party explained exactly why the committee in charge of building the monument had to be replaced by a group of more loyal Americans:

... they invited contributions in ornamented stones, to be placed, under the direction of the architect, in the face of the wall of the chamber. Among others, a stone was sent from the Pope of Rome, and was received by the managers, to be placed, as the others, in some conspicuous place.

It was an American monument, and its construction and management was said to be mainly in the hands of Catholics and Foreigners [We] have set [sic] to you, the free citizens of free States, with power to remove and bring to account those who dare turn a wrathful eye on the movements of those native to the soil . . . Let it go forth—publish it wherever in this broad land, those born beneath the stars and stripes, the glorious banner of our Union, have met, or shall meet, to resolve that Americans must and shall govern America.²

It is difficult to fully understand the political developments which led to the short-lived domination of Lancaster County's politics by a zealous, sometimes fanatical anti-foreign and anti-Catholic party, a party based on nationalism at the peak of the sectional controversy. Considering the diverse population and the history of the county as a sanctuary for various religious and ethnic minorities, Know-Nothingism was an astonishing and inconsistent development.

Lancaster County, located on the Maryland border nearly seventy miles from Philadelphia, was settled originally by English Quakers, Swiss Mennonites, and French Huguenots in the early eighteenth century.³ It was a melting pot throughout that century, absorbing immigrants of thirteen different nationalities through 1854.

At the same time, there were fifteen major religious denominations in the county; the setting was, and always had been, culturally and ethnically diverse.

Economic diversity was also a trait of the county; although it was primarily an agricultural community, producing over half of the tobacco crop of the state, the nineteenth century ushered in several industries, iron in particular, and Lancaster City, the county seat, was an important trade center. The city was the fourth largest in Pennsylvania with a population of 14,300 in 1854, compared to a county population of 105,600.

Lancaster County was proud of its diversity, its cultural heritage and its conservatism in 1850; it retained much of its traditional character up to that time, and up to the present day. Its diversity was always a source of pride, which makes the development of strong nativist beliefs even more difficult to understand. It is necessary to search for political, social and economic factors which caused Lancasterians, many of them removed by only one generation from Europe, to reject new immigrants, especially Catholics, and to blame their political and economic woes on foreigners.

CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Antimasonic Heritage

The death of the Federalist party left a majority of Lancaster County voters without a political base, and it caused an extremely low rate of voter participation outside of the city, dropping as low as 8.8 percent in 1822 and averaging only 33.3 percent during the 1820's. Removed by their remoteness from the center of political controversy, the city, and unwilling to support Jackson in 1824 and 1828, most of the rural voters simply ignored the politics of the day.¹

During the 1820's, county politics was controlled by the city in the absence of county opposition. There had been an intense rivalry between the Federalists of the county and the Republicans of the city for years, but the rivalry was gone and Jackson won the city and county with ease in 1824 and 1828. The county had the strength and the disposition to oppose Jackson, but there was no local organized opposition.

In 1829 the unification of the rural voters was accomplished by the Antimasonic party which swept the county in that year. It drew its strength from the rural, tradition-oriented voters who had been politically dormant for years; voting percentages rose to over 50 percent, and Lancaster County sent six of a total of fifteen Antimasons to the state legislature. The new party was embraced by the people, sweeping the county throughout the 1830's. In 1832,

county voters supported William Wirt, the Antimasonic candidate for President.

Wirt-Antimason	5140
Jackson-Democrat	4061
Clay-National Republican	7 ²

Part of the Antimasonic attraction was opposition to immigration of Catholics and condemnation of secret societies; Wirt's platform was mildly nativistic and wholly opposed to secret orders. The election of 1834 continued Antimasonic domination, but the city remained firmly in the hands of the Democrats. State Senator:

Strohm-Antimason	4908	City—261
Slaymaker-Democrat	3853	804 ³

Between 1834 and 1836, a small group of Antimasons urged a switch to the Whig party in order to unite national opposition to the Democrats. The party organization refused, but supported Harrison in 1836 and 1840 as the only opposition candidate with a chance to succeed.

1836	Harrison-Whig	6250
	Van Buren-Democrat	4143
1840	Harrison	9678
	Van Buren	5470 ⁴

In both years it was the national situation, rather than the local one, which forced the Antimasons to support Harrison. There was a growing Whig faction in Lancaster County, but it was the Antimasonic organization which completely controlled county politics; they could have easily defeated the small but growing Whig faction.⁵

The first serious challenge to the Antimasonic party came in 1842. It was by then apparent that the Whig party was more viable because of its national strength—the Whigs had elected a President, and although they had needed Antimasonic votes, they were clearly the stronger of the two parties. The Antimasons were challenged by a third party in 1842: managing to win all but two offices, they demonstrated that they were still strong, but they were nevertheless badly split. Most of them seemed willing to join with the Whigs, while a group of hard-core Antimasons argued after the election that it was time to purify the Antimasonic party and face the Whig challenge.

The crisis finally came in 1843, when the Whigs of Lancaster supported the nomination of Henry Clay for President. The die-hard Antimasons had an aversion to Clay dating back to the election of 1832 when they supported Wirt against him. The pro-Clay Whigs won the county elections in 1843 and they seemed certain to envelop the Antimasonic party completely. A Whig State Convention was held, attended by rival delegations from Lancaster County, a majority delegation supporting Clay and the new Whig party, and a minority faction, led by a prominent Lancaster attorney, Thad-

deus Stevens, determined to oppose Henry Clay. When the convention seated the pro-Clay Whigs, Stevens and his followers dramatically stalked away, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the meeting.⁶

A few more than three hundred Lancaſtrians refused to make the change from the Antimasonic to the Whig party; although Stevens joined the Whigs a few years later, his supporters remained outside of the party. Many of them became continual third party supporters, finding temporary homes in the Free Soil party, the Temperance party and the Native American party.⁷ The conservatism of the county allowed it to drift along in the old Antimasonic party long after it was clear that the Whig party was the only serious national opposition to the Democrats. That same conservatism endeared a few hundred men so completely to the old party that they refused to associate with a party based on different issues. Reluctance to change political affiliations was to become even more of a singular trait in the 1850's.

Early Nativism

Nationally, the Antimasonic party showed nativistic tendencies during the 1830's, but conditions were not always favorable to extreme nativism during its years of popularity. There were, however, outbreaks of violence among natives and immigrants in New York City in 1834 and 1841.⁸ Nativist feelings in some locations were extremely prevalent during the 1840's, and the Whig party used them for its own political purposes. In Pittsburgh, for example, the people were caught in an economic slump amid a population explosion. A high rate of unemployment underlined existing class and ethnic divisions, causing an outburst of strikes and general unrest. At the same time, immigrants were beginning to develop separate ethnic institutions, such as German libraries and newspapers. A Native American party was formed there as a reaction to those conditions, and the Whig party began to take nativist positions to regain lost votes.⁹

Lancaster was plagued by none of those conditions, but the developments elsewhere brought the issues into the public eye; nativist feelings were never exceptionally strong in the county during the 1840's, but there were times when immigration became a significant issue. In 1841 the Lancaster *Examiner*, a Whig paper, ran several articles advocating that the United States should reduce imports and that citizens should refuse to purchase foreign-made goods. It was an argument essentially about the tariff, favoring self-sufficiency, but it went beyond the tariff issue. The *Examiner* ran its columns on those problems at the same time that the state legislature was debating a constitutional amendment which would have prevented all foreigners of Irish or German parentage from voting or holding office if they entered the country after July 4, 1841.¹⁰

In 1844 the *American Republican* began to publish in Lancaster as a Native American newspaper. After the election of 1844 the *Examiner* urged that the Whigs take a position in favor of amended naturalization laws to force the nativists to join the Whig party, for the *Republican* had gained quite a following. In the Congressional election of 1844, the Native American candidate had polled 2574 votes, 17.2 percent of the total. Nearly all of those votes were taken from the Whig candidate who won, nevertheless, by a comfortable margin. The Whig organization officially ignored the Native American faction.

In the 1845 municipal elections in Lancaster city, the Native Americans again ran a ticket, opposing the Democratic and Whig candidates for mayor. The results stunned the Whig organization as the Native Americans outpolled the Whigs by 25.7 percent to 18.1 percent. The defeat of the Whigs in the Presidential election on a national level, coupled with the local problems caused by the Native Americans, brought out predictions from the Democrats that the Whig party was on the decline. Indeed, it seemed quite possible, for the Native Americans were attempting to build a national party and split permanently from the Whigs; they held national conventions in Philadelphia in 1845 and in Pittsburgh in 1847.¹¹

In 1847 the Native American party of Pennsylvania ran a wealthy Lancaster attorney, Emmanuel C. Reigart, for Governor. Reigart was a member of an old and influential Lancaster family, and had practiced law in the city since 1822. In 1834 he was elected to the state legislature on the Antimasonic ticket. The following year he delivered a speech favoring a resolution introduced by Thaddeus Stevens for suppression of Masonic oaths. He attended the State Constitutional Convention in 1837, cooperating fully with Stevens, and in 1843 he followed the lead of Stevens and refused to support the Whig party. He drifted from that point into the Native American party, first as its candidate for Congress in 1846, then as the statewide gubernatorial candidate.¹²

Nativism had declined since 1845, in Lancaster and throughout the state, leaving Reigart with little support. In fact, his support in Lancaster was limited to the old Antimasons who were followers of Stevens; he received only 83 votes in his own city, 5.3 percent of the total, and 354 votes in the county, a mere 2.5 percent. Statewide, Reigart received 11,000 votes, 3.9 percent of the total.¹³ After 1847, the Native American party failed to run candidates in Lancaster County. When national issues became important, it could not hold on to its support, and the Whig party became strong and unified from 1847 to 1850 by concentrating on national politics. Reigart's official biography reports that after his loss in 1847 he spent the rest of his life in political retirement. Actually he became an extremely active member of the Know-Nothing order in 1854, running for the party's nomination for Congress. He apparently dis-

avowed his connections with Know-Nothingism before his biography was written.¹⁴

The rebel Antimasons of 1843 seem to have composed the backbone of the Native American party a few years later. Its ranks were swelled by some Whigs, supporting it because of economic reasons or simple dissatisfaction with the Whig organization, but it was never a serious threat to Whig hegemony in the county. The Whigs were able to control and contain the factional interests primarily because they had a national organization that could compete with the Democrats. Reigart and the old Antimasons continued to buck the organization from time to time; a few of them voted for Van Buren on the Free Soil ticket in 1848, which polled 163 votes, 0.9 percent, in the county. Others supported the Temperance ticket in 1851, which received up to nearly 8 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, they were very active in politics, and were again to become serious political contenders in the unusual political battles waged from 1854 to 1856.

Although nativism was temporarily a political issue from 1841 to 1847, there was no evidence of social causation until 1849. There were no violent incidents, no strikes, or labor disputes, and above all there seems to have been no harsh feelings between Protestants and Catholics. Only two rather small occurrences, both at the end of the decade, hinted at the mounting social problems caused by ethnic relations. Both of the incidents involved expansion in the city's churches.

The First Reformed Church of Lancaster had a congregation composed of German immigrants and English natives. For many years services had been held in German and English without hostility or rivalry, but by 1849 steady immigration had given the Germans a clear majority in the congregation and ethnic quarrels were beginning. When the Germans managed to elect all of the church officers the following year, the minister recommended a divided congregation; the English moved across the street and founded St. Paul's Reformed Church.¹⁵ As immigration began to affect the daily lives of the people it created tension, for the English did not object to a mixed congregation until the Germans acquired a majority voice in church affairs.

The second incident involved St. Mary's Catholic Church in the Southwest Ward of the city, and again an ethnic division took place. Since the early part of the century, St. Mary's congregation had been primarily Irish, but heavy immigration of German Catholics began to undermine Irish domination in the 1840's. A quarrel erupted in 1849, resulting in a split that led the Germans to begin a new church, now St. Joseph's.¹⁶ Again it was immigration which had upset the balance of power, leading to an ethnic conflict. There was no Catholic-Protestant hostility during the 1840's, but there was at least a degree of native-foreign tension as a result of per-

ceived threats to established power on both a political and social level. It was apparent by 1850 that further increases in immigration could instigate open hostility among natives and foreigners.

The Composition of the Parties before 1850

As a general rule, the Whig party in the North was thought to have drawn most of its support from businessmen, manufacturers and farmers. Whigs were normally somewhat more wealthy than Democrats, who were generally professional men and urban laborers and artisans.¹⁷ The Party positions on the tariff issue seem to bear out the interpretation, at least to a degree. The wealthier Whigs could afford higher prices and favored tariffs to protect their business interests, while the backbone of the Democratic party, the laborer, supported a free trade policy and lower prices.

In Lancaster, wealth and occupation certainly affected party affiliation, although it is impossible to positively determine a man's political preference from those factors alone. Most of the forty Lancastrians earning over \$10,000 in 1849 were Whigs, perhaps by two to one over the Democrats. In terms of occupation, most physicians seemed to be Democrats, but most attorneys were Whigs.¹⁸ The merchants and tradesmen of the city leaned to the Democrats, the bankers to the Whigs. The Laborers and artisans earning less than \$200 a year comprised 85 percent of the eligible voters of the city, and they were responsible for the heavy Democratic majority in the city. The Whigs dominated the county throughout the 1840's by polling the agricultural vote.

It is important to note that immigrants, when naturalized, voted strongly in favor of the Democrats. The party of Jackson was associated with opportunity, precisely what the immigrants sought when they left their native land. Furthermore, most of them fell into the low income brackets and, like the native laborers in similar positions, they naturally opposed the monetary wealth of the city Whigs and the wealth in land of the rural farmers. The Democrats reciprocated by encouraging immigration and welcoming new arrivals. Lancaster's Democratic paper, the *Intelligencer and Journal* openly supported foreign-born peoples against nativist assaults, and it was firm in its conviction that naturalized citizens were as loyal as natives. In the South the Democrats frequently produced fraudulent naturalization papers for aliens to boost their vote, but that was never charged in Lancaster.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the fondness of Whig party voters for Native American movements was, in part, a result of the foreign-born support the Democrats received.

In Lancaster, as in the rest of the nation, forces of economic welfare guided party development. The Whigs were proud of their conservatism, for it was undoubtedly designed to protect their economic interests. The Democrats, in the Jacksonian tradition, emphasized the common man and his right to economic opportunity.

There is some danger in overemphasizing the class nature of political parties, for there are other factors to consider, but economics was certainly one determining force, one which was an integral part of the later Know-Nothing unity among wealthy Whigs and Democratic laborers.

CHAPTER 2

PARTY POLITICS: 1850-1853

Whig Unity Fails

From 1848 to 1853 the Whig party maintained its overwhelming majority in the county, while on the national and state level the Whigs began to crumble. Division and disunity began to plague the Lancaster Whig organization despite continued local success, slowly dragging the party into a major schism.

In 1848 Lancaster County gave large majorities to the victorious Whig candidates for Governor and President, William F. Johnston and Zachary Taylor. It was, perhaps, the high point in the life of the Whig party, for it was unified and strong. It was able to hold the Free Soil vote to less than one percent while holding together all of the other factions which periodically ran a ticket. The unity of the party was equally strong in 1850, when Thaddeus Stevens ran for Congress, and won, as the candidate of the Whig organization. His presence was enough to deter a third party movement and assure Whig solidarity.

Late in 1850 the local Whigs first encountered serious dissent within the party. The Compromise of 1850, with its strong Fugitive Slave Clause, triggered a debate over slavery that was to gradually erode the influence of the Whig organization. The leaders of the party, including the editors of the *Examiner*, were extremely conservative on the slavery issue. When slavery emerged as the primary issue, moderate and radical Whigs began to challenge them by demanding that they condemn the Fugitive Slave law. The Whig organization firmly maintained that it was inexpedient to further agitate the slave question.¹ The *Examiner* warned that it deplored the failure of some local Whigs to fully support the Compromise of 1850, insisting that the party unite in a unanimous effort to destroy all "abolitionists."²

As members of the rank and file began to challenge the official position on slavery, they also became bold enough to express another source of dissatisfaction, the method of selecting candidates for city and county offices. The customary method was to hold delegate elections in each community, with the winners attending a county convention later in the year. The delegates were then to vote on which candidates were to represent the party in the general election. Even the *Examiner*, normally the organ of the Whig leader-

ship, announced that it favored primary elections to allow the people to select their candidates directly. Despite its official position and a rash of letters it published urging a change in the system, the county committee refused to make the change.³ In 1851 the issue gradually died, but it was to cause more serious difficulties as each election approached.

Once candidates were selected for the Gubernatorial election of 1851, the controversies were put aside in favor of the task of reelecting Governor Johnston, although a few dissatisfied Whigs supported a Temperance ticket in the county. Throughout the state, the Whigs bickered over slavery and the Compromise of 1850, but the *Examiner* limited its campaign to economic issues, conducting a successful discussion of thrift and economy in the state government under Johnston. Lancaster County responded by giving Johnston an overwhelming majority:

Johnston-Whig	11064
Bigler-Democrat	6226 ⁴

In the state, the Whig organization was unable to overcome dissension; although the Whigs make a creditable showing, the Democratic candidate, William Bigler, was elected.

The *Examiner* accused abolitionists of dividing the party and defeating Johnston, calling for a universal return to conservative "Old Guard principles."⁵ The Democrats took pleasure in announcing that Johnston's defeat would finally disintegrate the Whig party into a number of factional interests. James Buchanan, a native of Lancaster, expressed surprise that the Whigs had done so well in 1851, attributing the close election to Governor Johnston's personal appeal:

The motley army of our opponents, Whigs, Abolitionists, free Soilers, Anti-Masons, and Native Americans, was marshalled in and led by Governor Johnston. This reckless but skilful [sic], able, and persevering demagogue alone could have combined such heterogeneous materials into one Solid Mass. Many of our Whigs, perhaps, indeed I believe a majority of them, are not free soilers; but their allegiance to party was too powerful for their principles.⁶

The party loyalty of which Buchanan spoke was particularly strong in Lancaster County, far stronger than in most of the state. In Lancaster, at least, there was no major organized opposition to Whig leadership. Yet there were significant centrifugal tendencies which were to become further magnified during the next few years.

Shortly after the election the remnants of complete unity were shattered by the appearance of a rival Whig newspaper. On November 12, 1851, the *Examiner* announced that the *Independent Whig* was publishing in Lancaster. It strenuously objected to the name chosen for the paper, charging that it was not a Whig paper, but an abolitionist organ. The men involved in its publication, it asserted, were not and never had been true Whigs. Furthermore,

the *Examiner* accused it of conspiring to turn the Whigs of Lancaster into "a contemptible abolition faction."⁷

In later weeks, it became clear to the editors of the *Examiner* that Thaddeus Stevens was largely responsible for the publication of the *Independent Whig*. After running for Congress as the candidate of the Whig organization in 1850, Stevens had proceeded immediately to infuriate the Whig leaders by leading a small group of abolitionists in Congress. Undoubtedly the *Independent Whig* was intended to be the spokesman for Stevens in the county, for it published letters written by him on several occasions, it defended his record in Congress, and he was a member of its superintending committee.⁸ By 1851 Stevens had become the one man who most seriously threatened the Whig organization in Lancaster County.

The *Examiner* had good reason to fear the power of Thaddeus Stevens and his connections with the *Independent Whig*, but there were other aspects of its rival paper that caused it even greater concern. The *Independent Whig* was openly courting Native American support by printing anti-foreign columns, and E. C. Reigart, the Native American candidate for Governor in 1847, was also a member of its superintending committee.⁹ A coalition of abolitionists and nativists was likely to cause a division serious enough to destroy the Whig party and to throw the county to the Democratic party.

Party division was avoided in 1852 by the fortunate choice of the Whig Presidential candidate, General Winfield Scott. Early in the year both the *Examiner* and the *Independent Whig* came out in favor of his nomination, although for totally different reasons. The *Examiner* argued that Scott firmly supported the Compromise of 1850, and that his position on the issue would appeal to Southern voters and reunite the party on the national level.¹⁰ The *Independent Whig* believed he was an abolitionist and a nativist—Scott apparently straddled the issues well enough to draw support from all sides at first, but it was precisely the lingering doubts about his positions that was to cost him votes in November.¹¹ Throughout the campaign the two papers bickered over Scott's views, until the *Examiner* finally made it clear that it simply wanted all abolitionist papers to shut up. Scott was running on a moderate platform, but his own views were unclear, and the *Examiner* knew that to debate the abolitionists throughout the campaign would simply cast more doubts on Scott, so ultimately it stopped the debate.¹²

During the summer of 1852 the *Independent Whig* focused its attack on the Whig County Committee. It capitalized on the discontent over the system of selecting candidates, charging that the Whig convention was generally unrepresentative. The old line Whigs firmly controlled the nominations in 1852, selecting a conservative slate of candidates and dumping Stevens in favor of Isaac Hiester, a Silver-Grey, or pro-slavery Whig.¹³

One final factor complicated the election of 1852 in the county,

the Temperance party. It had run a slate of candidates in 1851, polling less than 8 percent of the vote, but it promised to draw a number of dissatisfied Whigs away from their party in 1852.¹⁴ The Stevens branch of the party ran no candidates for office, but a number of his supporters refused to aid the ticket of the organization; although it was not clearly their policy to support the Temperance ticket, it seemed the logical place to turn in order to show up the organization without throwing the election to the Democrats. The Temperance vote promised to be at least a small factor in the local elections.

The county elections, held on October 12, resulted in the usual Whig victory, but by barely over 50 percent of the vote. Isaac Hiester won the Congressional seat by 8840 to 6456, but the Temperance candidate polled nearly 1900 votes, or 11 percent of the total.¹⁵ The Temperance vote was probably indicative of Stevens' support throughout the county; it was less than 20 percent of the total Whig strength in the county, but it was growing and it was already the strongest third party movement since the Native Americans in 1844. The dissident Whigs represented a swing of nearly 2000 votes in any county election, enough, with only a few additional votes, to throw an election to the Democrats.

For the Presidential election the Whigs were united in favor of Scott, winning a decisive victory over Pierce in the county.

Scott-Whig	11636
Pierce-Democrat	6578 ¹⁶

Scott's majority was twice the size of Hiester's, but the unity in Lancaster County was not representative of the statewide results. Opposition to the Democrats could always be victorious in Pennsylvania if it was solidly behind one candidate, but the Whigs throughout the state were in the midst of a bitter feud and were unable to provide a majority for Scott. The demise of the Whig party was moving rapidly in the state, but quite slowly in Lancaster County.

The *Examiner* rejoiced that Lancaster Whigs had prevented the abolitionists from ruining the local party. It naturally lamented Pierce's tremendous national majority, but it took pride in the achievements of Lancaster County Whigs. "Lancaster County still stands firm and erect, as the GIBRALTAR OF WHIGGERY."¹⁷

After the election, Lancaster, along with most of the nation, entered a period of relative political calm and inactivity. The feud between the *Examiner* and the *Independent Whig* did not cease altogether, but it proceeded at a slow pace. It was a time to reflect upon the past and to be philosophical about the future of the Whig party. The *Intelligencer* enjoyed publicizing the decline of the Whigs, mentioning several states where the Whigs were no longer strong enough even to run a slate of candidates, and confidently predicting the complete death of the Whig party by 1856.¹⁸ The *Examiner* was perceptive enough to realize that its party was in deep

trouble—the disputes within the party had given way to complete apathy and lack of political activity. Largely responsible for the calm political atmosphere in Lancaster was the bleak national situation in the Whig party. The Whig leaders, however, tried to be optimistic:

The Whig party is sleeping, but it is not dead. It will awake in due season, and rested from its labors, be all the better prepared for whatever events may happen.¹⁹

Into the calm and depressing political scene was dropped a political bombshell in 1853, an issue that exemplified every sense of dissatisfaction in the Whig party of Lancaster County. Charles Boughter, a Whig from Lancaster City, was a candidate for the Whig nomination to the office of County Treasurer. At the County Convention, held in August, he lost the nomination in a close vote. The following day he publicly charged that the nomination had been fraudently stolen from him; he also announced that he would easily have won the nomination in a primary election, that he was the legitimate candidate for Treasurer, and that he would run for the office as an independent candidate. The attention of the entire county, Democrats and Whigs alike, was focused on Charles Boughter during the campaign of 1853.²⁰

To the *Independent Whig*, Boughter was a hero, and they championed his cause, while the *Examiner* called him a “base office-seeker”, accusing him of conspiring with Stevens and the Democrats to destroy the Whig party.²¹ The *Intelligencer* promised him Democratic support, and when the *Examiner* accused Stevens of supporting Boughter, he replied that he would rather vote for the entire Democratic ticket than for those responsible for the persecution of Boughter.²² As charges and countercharges continued to come from all sides, it promised to be an interesting election.

Amid the controversy over Boughter, the Temperance party again announced a ticket, although they ran candidates for only a few offices. In previous years, the major parties had ignored the Temperance party, but in 1853 it posed a serious threat to the Whigs; the *Examiner* charged that its candidates were nothing more than renegade Whigs anxious for power. It then accused the Temperance party of conspiring to give all of its votes to Boughter, not an unlikely charge, since the Stevens faction was the backbone of the Temperance vote.²³ By the day of the election, the Whigs knew that Boughter might actually win the election.

The election resulted in a Whig victory by an average margin of 8800 to 5500 over the Democrats, but the results varied in most races. Boughter received 6826 votes, a few hundred short of victory, and the Temperance ticket polled up to 3800 votes.²⁴ It was a Whig victory, but it represented an increase in dissent through an unprecedented third party vote. Certainly it was a far cry from the larger Whig majorities of the late 1840's.

From 1850 to 1853 the Whig party lost more ground in the rest of the nation than it did in Lancaster County. In the South, for example, the Compromise of 1850 signaled a rapid Whig demise, with the party degenerating into a mere fragmentary opposition group. Older members of the Southern rank and file were willing to hope for better days ahead, but the younger voters moved quickly to the Democratic party.²⁵ In most areas of the North, Whigs were less conservative than the party leaders in Lancaster—the old guard was plagued by stronger factional interests in those areas, as the liberal Whigs strenuously objected to the Compromise of 1850 and the national platform of 1852.²⁶ As the loyal Whigs of Lancaster County slowly lost ground to a splinter group led by Thaddeus Stevens, they began to realize that the old party could no longer expect to win a national election. The situation created in the early years of the decade demanded a new party under new leadership if opposition to the Democrats was to be plausible in the future.

The Democratic Split

Two factors in particular prevented the Democrats from taking the county from the Whigs during the years of the Whig decline. The primary factor was the strong anti-Democratic tradition in Lancaster County, so deeply rooted that the rural population was willing to support a third party movement, no matter what the issues were, or to abstain altogether from politics rather than to vote Democratic. A secondary reason was that the Democrats had severe problems of their own, certainly not as serious as those of the Whigs, but damaging enough to leave them vulnerable to a third party in 1854.

A rather mild split in the Democratic party in Pennsylvania can be traced back to 1845, when President Polk named James Buchanan, then a Senator from Pennsylvania, to his cabinet as Secretary of State. To fill the vacancy left by Buchanan, the Democratic majority in the legislature expected to elect George W. Woodward, an orthodox Democrat advocating a free trade policy. A minority faction of pro-tariff Democrats, however, refused to support Woodward, nominating Simon Cameron, a Democratic advocate of a protective tariff. Cameron was subsequently elected by a coalition of Whigs, Democrats and Native Americans, and he served from 1845 to 1849.²⁷

After the election, a fierce feud developed within the Democratic party between those who approved of Buchanan's traditional control over the Democratic party of the state and those who supported his national opposition, Lewis Cass and his major statewide opponent, Cameron. In Philadelphia, there were rival Democratic newspapers, the *Pennsylvanian*, a pro-tariff spokesman, and the *Spirit of the Times*, advocating a policy of free trade. Those two papers fought in a bitter rivalry that in turn affected Democrats in other parts of the state.²⁸ In June of 1851 rival Democratic delegations from Lancaster County attended the Democratic State Conven-

tion, an anti-tariff, pro-Buchanan group, and a pro-tariff delegation following the lead of Simon Cameron. The convention refused to seat the pro-tariff delegations from Philadelphia and Lancaster. The feud was to create bitter scenes in several local areas around the state in the following months. Even by 1854, it had not been completely resolved.²⁹

Symptomatic of the feud in Lancaster was the municipal election in 1852. Christian Kieffer ran as the Whig candidate and polled nearly half of the Democratic vote, defeating the party candidate, a Buchanan Democrat, 948 to 788.³⁰ Most of the pro-Cass Democrats voted for Kieffer swinging the election to the Whigs.

In 1853 Kieffer ran for reelection as an Independent, winning by an even greater margin and holding onto his coalition. In 1854 he won again, but as the Democratic candidate.³¹ His switch to the Democratic party indicates that the Democratic split was gradually being healed, while the Whig party was steadily declining. The problems in the Democratic party were simply less serious than those in the Whig party, and they were being solved. Yet the Democrats began the year 1854 with a shaky and vulnerable unity. The Know-Nothings were able to again split the Democrats later that year and to throw the political life of the county into a chaotic state.

CHAPTER 3

KNOW-NOTHINGS SWEEP INTO POWER

National Origins of the Order

The Know-Nothing party first appeared in the state of New York in the elections of 1850 and 1852.¹ Without a significant state-wide organization, it was local in nature, characterized by intense secrecy. By June of 1854 there were local parties throughout the nation which met in New York City to draw up the Constitution and Ritual of the party. The terms American party and Know-Nothing party were used synonymously and will be considered as such here. Revisions of the Constitution and Ritual were made at a meeting in Cincinnati on November 15, 1854.²

The Know-Nothing party was organized as a secret order, with local lodges throughout the country using its secret signs, grips and passwords. Lodge meetings were rituals of standard oaths and of secret ceremonies. There were three degrees of membership, each with its own particular oath, with various demands and responsibilities placed on each of the levels. Membership was limited to male citizens of at least twenty-one years of age, native-born Protestants, and there was a provision in most states that no member could be married to a Catholic. One third of the membership was always sufficient to blackball an applicant for membership, while in some instances it could be done by two or three votes. Failure

to vote for any party nominee resulted first in a warning, and, if repeated, led to expulsion.³

The individual lodges were the backbone of the organization, but above them were regional and state councils which nominated candidates for office and answered to the National Council. The National Council was composed of delegates from all states having Know-Nothing lodges and was responsible for receiving reports on membership and dues from state and regional councils and performing other administrative functions.⁴ The American party was an eccentric blend of practical politics and childish antics—highly ordered and well disciplined, but emphasizing secrecy and ritual in an almost mystical way.

1854 in Lancaster

Pennsylvania was to elect a Governor, a Canal Commissioner and a state legislature in 1854, as well as all of its representatives to the House in Congress. Even into the early summer it seemed like a simple two-party race, as the Whigs and Democrats prepared to nominate candidates.

The Whigs nominated James Pollock for Governor, and he was given the full support of the local Whig paper, the *Examiner*. The Whig organization in Lancaster ran the incumbent, Isaac Hiester, for Congress. It again appeared that the Whigs would easily win the county offices, but the Democrats named a full slate of candidates nevertheless. On the state level, the Democrats seemed to have a clear edge; a unified party running against a shaky coalition, they nominated Governor Bigler for reelection and Henry S. Mott for Canal Commissioner.

Although clearly ahead in the statewide races, the Democrats were defensive about the statewide issues, for they were accused of having chartered too many banks, causing a run of inflation during their years in office, and of applying licensing laws where state licensing was totally unnecessary. The Whigs hoped to reverse the trend of chartering banks and to repeal all licensing laws in the state.⁵ The confidence of the Democrats resulted not from the strength of their positions on the issues of the day, but from their belief that the Whig party was dying, degenerating into "isms and factions."⁶ They seriously felt that the Whigs would fail to hold together for the election, and that Pollock was the weakest of candidates and easy to defeat.⁷

Lancaster County Whigs, of course, were deeply concerned over the split between the old guard and the Stevens branch of the party, yet they knew that the Stevens' faction was too small to defeat them unless it combined with another strong party, a highly unlikely situation. The *Examiner* exuded confidence, scoffing at Democratic suggestions that the Whig party was dead; not only would the Whigs

be victorious in the state in 1854, it said, but "the Whigs will in the year 1856 in like manner [as in 1848] respond to their disbanding proclamations by electing some sterling old-school National Whig to the Presidency."⁸ Indeed, the Whig party in Lancaster did not seem particularly weak until, late in the summer, when the two-party system was disrupted by the Know-Nothings.

It is unclear exactly when Know-Nothing lodges first began to operate in Lancaster County, but by August of 1854, the *Examiner* and the *Intelligencer* were aware of the threat. The *Intelligencer* carried its first article on the Know-Nothing party on June 6, 1854, expressing shock that Philadelphia, a city so close to home, would have a Know-Nothing lodge. On June 13, it condemned nativism for religious intolerance and accused the *Examiner* of supporting local Know-Nothing sentiment. By June 20, it carried five major articles attacking Know-Nothingism, but still there was no mention of local lodges. Almost overnight nativism became the hottest issue of the campaign; the Democrats staunchly defended the foreigners who had fought for America from the Revolution up to the Mexican-American War, and they viewed Know-Nothingism as "the new adjunct of Whiggery."⁹

Early in the summer the Democrats had been on the defensive regarding the fiscal policies of the state, but by August they were on the attack. They condemned James Pollock for joining a Know-Nothing lodge in Philadelphia on June 19,¹⁰ and they accused the editor of the *Examiner*, Edmund Kline, of secretly joining a lodge in Lancaster.¹¹ They did not expect a third party to run a ticket and they concentrated on linking the Whigs with the Know-Nothings, accusing the local Whigs of falling in with "every wind of doctrine that may promise to result in temporary success."¹² They pictured the Whigs as desperate men, driven by the failure of their national party to "excite one sort of professing Christians against another—to array one class of citizens against another—to prosecute the cause of temperance and the sacred cause of education to mere partizan [*sic*] ends."¹³ The *Intelligencer* admitted that the Whigs would carry the county in 1854, but it said that the party was "an admixture of Silver-Greyism, Woolly Headism and Know-Nothingism"¹⁴ which could never outlast another election.

The *Examiner* first mentioned the Know-Nothings on June 7, when it reported on rioting between Catholics and Know-Nothings in New York City. Throughout the summer months, it constantly reiterated the fact that it was in no way connected with the Know-Nothings, and it preferred to simply publish denials and otherwise deemphasize nativism as an issue, for it knew that the Whigs were vulnerable to a division over nativism.

On August 16, the *Examiner* announced that the *Inland Weekly* had begun to publish in Lancaster. It was published by the same concerns that had run the *Independent Whig*, so the Whigs feared

that it held abolitionist sentiments and that Thaddeus Stevens was involved in its publication.¹⁵ The first few issues of the *Inland* simply discussed mundane affairs—road conditions, fear of a grain shortage, prison statistics and other similar items.¹⁶ Then, on September 16, it announced its political position with the huge headline “KNOW-NOTHING.”¹⁷ Thereafter, as the Know-Nothing organ of Lancaster County, it carried the nine-point platform of the party at the head of each issue:

An extension of the term of residency for the naturalization of foreigners to twenty-one years.

The passage of laws to prevent the immigration of foreign paupers from becoming a burden upon our people, and to put a stop to the introduction of foreign convicts into this country.

Opposition to the attainment of political power by the Church of Rome or by any other church.

The passage of such laws as will cause those institutions of the Roman Church, which are adverse to the spirit of our Government, to become amenable to the supervision and authority of our civil jurisprudence.

The breaking up of party intrigues and with it that vast system of political knavery which has become so great a curse and bane to the country.

A true American Nationality.

The encouragement of American genius, art and industry.

The elevation, education, rights, happiness of the masses.

And to sum up all in a few words; our great end and aim is to **place the Government of America IN THE HANDS OF TRUE AMERICANS.**¹⁸

Typical of the *Inland's* political comments was its sweeping accusation that the Democratic party throughout the nation practiced “servility and toadyism to foreigners.”¹⁹ The major Know-Nothing issue in Pennsylvania was giving publicity to the Catholic criticism of the public school fund of the state which, said the *Inland*, was designed to “destroy the public schools, and then to have the children of the poorer classes of society either entirely uneducated or educated only under the direction of Catholic Priests.”²⁰ Among the Know-Nothings there was great fear that Catholics in office, especially Irish Catholics, were tools of the Pope, working for elimination of religious freedom.²¹

While the *Intelligencer* and the *Examiner* exchanged epithets, accusations and denials during the summer, the nativists busily organized lodges throughout the county. When the Know-Nothing County Convention met in the Lancaster Mechanics Hall on August 14, nineteen lodges were represented, four from the city and the rest from small rural towns. The business of the day was to recommend nominees to an Independent ticket to oppose the Democrats and Whigs in November.²² A list of candidates for the nominations was published in all local papers for the following week.

The rapid organization of the American party was no less than astonishing; there is no indication that anyone in Lancaster knew of the Know-Nothings before June, and by August there were nineteen lodges planning to run a ticket against long established parties. Furthermore, a census of Lancaster City lodges taken in late 1854 revealed that lodge membership was 886, over 25 percent of the eligible voters of the city and nearly 40 percent of the average voter participation from 1850 to 1853.²³

Although the local lodges were extraordinarily practical in political organization, they were also adamant in their devotion to secrecy and ritual. The members devised codes to keep their names secret, codes so simple that any interested person could easily have broken them. One code was the substitution of figures for letters, so that "Robert A. Evans" was represented by "17-177. 9.6.11.22.23."²⁴ Another was simply a letter reversal, so that the secretary of Lodge 42, Charles L. Frick, signed his name "Sahc L. Kcirf."²⁵

An applicant for membership in a Know-Nothing lodge in Lancaster could be rejected by three negative votes, but before the vote was taken he was questioned and asked to take the first degree oath:

I _____, do solemnly swear upon this sacred volume (or cross) before Almighty God and these witnesses that I will not divulge any question proposed to me here, whether I become a member of this order or not; and that I will never, under any circumstances whatever, mention the name of any person I may see present during any of the meetings, or that I know any such order to be in existence, and that I will a true answer make to every question asked of me, so help me God.²⁶

If approved for membership, the applicant was taught the secret signs and grips, and then how to obtain entrance into the council. After a two week trial period, he was eligible for second degree status, for which he was required to swear another oath. The third degree, awarded later, imposed higher obligations and was the only card carrying level.²⁷

None of the rituals, however childish, seemed to curtail the Know-Nothing movement in 1854. In September, the County Committee met with a citizens committee of non-lodge members and added a few outsiders to their list of possible candidates. Back in the secrecy of the lodges, they voted for a ticket, ultimately composed of fifteen lodge members for twenty offices; it was called the Independent ticket and announced in the *Inland* on September 30. A statewide ticket was also announced, carrying the names of the Whig candidate for Governor, James Pollock, and the Democratic candidate for Canal Commissioner, Henry S. Mott, both of whom were believed to be members of Know-Nothing lodges in Pennsylvania.²⁸

The Campaign of 1854

The Independent ticket was an unusual mixture of Democrats,

Whigs, and old Antimasons who had been members of various third parties for years. By announcing their ticket after the Democrats and Whigs, the Know-Nothings had been able to support candidates of both the older parties who were secretly members of the Know-Nothing order. It soon became apparent that neither the Democratic nor the Whig party organizations had the vaguest idea which candidates were loyal to them and which were actually Know-Nothings. The campaign quickly began to focus on four candidates in particular: James Pollock, Henry S. Mott, and the two Democratic candidates for State Assembly, Hugh M. North and Jacob L. Gross. All four had Know-Nothing support. The Whigs also began to show concern over their prospects in the Congressional race; the incumbent, Isaac Hiester, had been considered a certain winner, but a three way race had developed between Hiester, Joseph S. Lefevre, the Democratic candidate, and Anthony E. Roberts, the Know-Nothing choice.

As early as September 12, the *Intelligencer* had expressed fear that the Know-Nothings were conspiring to find members of their order on the major party tickets and sweep them into office. For that reason, the Democrats had spent long hours in debate over whether or not to run a ticket, but finally they did.²⁹ When the Know-Nothing ticket appeared, they accused it of being "made up, from Congressman to Coroner, of renegades from both parties, political apostates, deserters and traitors, whose only principle is office."³⁰ Yet they made exceptions to that statement. The *Intelligencer* announced that John Wise, J. F. Reigart and Anthony E. Roberts had been placed on the Know-Nothing ticket without their consent and were not members of the order.³¹ Here the *Intelligencer* simply fell for a trick and revealed the confusion that had befallen the major parties. The members of the order probably had quite a laugh at the next lodge meeting, for John Wise was the President of the County Committee, J. F. Reigart was one of its secretaries, and Anthony Roberts never withdrew his name from the Know-Nothing ticket.

The *Intelligencer* was even more adamant in denying that two candidates on its own ticket, North and Gross, were Know-Nothings. It published long letters from each of them denying their connections with the order, while the *Inland* and the *Examiner* continued to claim that they were indeed members of the order.³² The *Intelligencer* also published a firm denial by Henry S. Mott and asserted that it was foolish to believe that a man of his character could possibly be a Know-Nothing.

The Democrats were surely not the only confused party in 1854. Three members of the Know-Nothing order were candidates for the Whig nomination to its county ticket, although all three of them failed to gain the nomination, and the Whigs escaped the embarrassment that the Democrats suffered. They were still faced, however, with the charge that James Pollock was a lodge member, and,

apparently aware that the charges were true, they never denied his connections with the order. The *Examiner* maintained complete silence on the issue, preferring to attack the Democratic candidates Mott, Gross and North for their Know-Nothing connections.³³

As election day approached, the *Examiner* began to focus its attacks on the Independent ticket, asserting that the ticket was chosen and supported by Know-Nothing lodges, which was undoubtedly true.³⁴ The Know-Nothing party was the principal threat to the Whigs, for it had apparently joined together nativists of Democratic and Whig extraction along with the followers of Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens, it was thought, had himself joined the lodge in the Southwest Ward of the city, despite his strong Antimasonic background of opposition to secret orders.³⁵ The Whig organization was simply too weak to hold on to its loose ends, and it found that the coalition between Lancaster's growing abolition faction and the large number of sincere nativists was threatening to defeat it even on the local level.

The *Inland* geared the last few weeks of its campaign to the Congressional struggle between Hiester and Roberts, a race that promised to be extremely close. It accused Hiester of secretly supporting the Roman Catholic religion, noting that he paid "pew rent of \$50. a year" to the Catholics,³⁶ and it went on to proclaim that the entire Catholic vote would be given to Hiester.³⁷ Roberts was defended as the candidate of the people, and the Know-Nothings predicted his victory with confidence.

The Election of 1854

The election was held on October 10, and it resulted in claims of victory by each party. The Whigs claimed a triumph in the county and the state as Pollock won the Gubernatorial race and swept the county by a large margin.

Bigler	4699
Pollock	10962 ³⁸

The *Inland* disputed the Whig claims of victory; "The election of James Pollock is not a Whig party triumph—it is emphatically an American Triumph."³⁹ The *Intelligencer* entered the dispute by declaring that neither party had won, but that Pollock's election was the result of a passing fusion, an "unholy alliance."⁴⁰

The only certainty involving the election was the Know-Nothings were able to decide every two-way race that was held. While a combination of Know-Nothings and Whigs defeated Bigler for the Governorship, a combination of Know-Nothings and Democrats swept Henry Mott into the office of Canal Commissioner. Mott's majority was the largest in the history of the state, while his margin in Lancaster was 10441 to 5596 over the Whig candidate George Darsie.⁴¹

The *Intelligencer* and the *Inland* argued bitterly over which party deserved the credit for Mott's victory.

The Congressional election was clearly a Know-Nothing victory, but the vote was split three ways in a close race.

Hiester-Whig	5395
Lefevre-Democrat	4108
Roberts-Independent	6079

The Know-Nothings also won the office of Associate Law Judge, but the Whigs managed to take nearly every county office by margins ranging from 100 to 250 votes. There was one other unusual occurrence which took place in the race for Lancaster's seats in the General Assembly. Hugh North and Jacob Gross were both elected by a combination of Democratic and Know-Nothing votes.

The most singularly important fact about the election was that in a few short months of political activity the Know-Nothings had taken control of the politics of the county. Their secrecy, although violated from time to time, had been so thorough that neither of the other parties could accurately assess their strength. The Whigs and Democrats were utterly confused, while the Know-Nothings had a relatively accurate appraisal of their strength through the size of their lodges. Furthermore, the Know-Nothings were able to gain votes by embarrassing both of the other parties, by nominating and supporting a few candidates running for the major parties and claiming them as their own.

Perhaps most important to the success of the Know-Nothings was the fact that all other campaign issues were shelved by September, and the election became a referendum on the issues presented by the Independent ticket. It was a peak year for immigration, and many people were attracted by the nativist platform. Others were lured by the secrecy and ritual of the lodges to support the Know-Nothing candidates. Had the Know-Nothings been forced to publish positions on slavery, banking and licensing, they would have made enemies and lost the air of mystery that surrounded them. The other parties, in their confusion, simply forgot that there were other issues to discuss, practically handing the election to the Independent ticket.

The Know-Nothings polled an average vote of 5477 in the county, and it is possible to determine from where most of those votes had been taken. The Whigs averaged 5656 votes, down from a previous average, tabulated in the years 1852 and 1853, of 8800 votes. The loss to the Whig organization was greater than 3000 votes; most of them went to the Know-Nothings. The Democrats dropped from an average vote of 5800 to 4393, representing a loss of nearly 1500 votes, probably all to the Independent ticket. The rest of the Know-Nothing vote came from the followers of Stevens and the supporters of the Temperance party. The *Inland* attracted the Temperance vote by firmly supporting a stringent set of liquor laws.

The election of 1854 shattered the traditional Whig majority in Lancaster County, as the Whigs lost several offices to combined Democratic and Know-Nothing votes by margins of nearly two to one. Although they won most of the county offices, they won by extremely small margins, representing a phenomenal loss of 3000 votes. The loss of the Congressional election coupled with similar Know-Nothing victories throughout the state proved catastrophic to the future of the Whig party. The Whigs were simply unable to maintain control of the county without Know-Nothing aid.

In the county, at least, the Whigs retained some of their former control and won most of the offices; they were shocked, especially by Hiester's defeat, but they were still an important force in the county. The Democrats of the city were perhaps even more astonished than the county Whig organization. Henry Mott was their only victory of importance, and even his landslide was claimed as a Know-Nothing victory. The average results of the election in the city reveal a Know-Nothing sweep.

Whig	359
Democrat	708
Independent	1069

The results are especially impressive because the Know-Nothings polled over 50 percent of the vote. Of the twenty-one candidates on the Independent ticket, nineteen carried the city; the Democrats ran twenty-two candidates, and only the three who were supported by the Know-Nothing order managed to carry the city. Only one Whig candidate, James Pollock, was supported by the Know-Nothings, and he, too carried the city.

To determine from where the Know-Nothings polled their votes in the city, it is necessary to look at the previous city election results. In the five municipal and general elections before the election of 1854, the Democrats averaged 1165 votes in the city, compared to an average of 770 for the Whigs. The Democratic vote in 1854, therefore, represented an average of 457 votes lost to the Know-Nothings, and the Whig total represented a loss of 411 votes. Indications are that the Know-Nothings drew equally from both parties in addition to polling the Temperance vote which had previously averaged nearly 150 votes in the city. The *Inland* had campaigned vigorously for temperance in the city, blaming German immigrants for the number of breweries in the area.⁴² Nearly 55 percent of former Whig voters changed to the Know-Nothing party, leaving only a small faction of loyal Whigs. Only about 40 percent of former Democrats supported the Know-Nothing order, but it was enough to destroy a previously solid Democratic majority. The Know-Nothings attracted a slightly larger percentage of the rather disunited Whigs than of the more cohesive Democrats, but the appeal of the Know-Nothing order was not aimed at the voters of one party in particular—it was based on an issue popular to Democratic and Whig voters alike.

Oddly, the election in the city was characterized by an extremely low turnout of voters, despite a vigorous and rather unusual campaign. The 61.7 percent participation was the lowest total by over ten percent for a general election since 1836.⁴³ Apparently a number of the voters were as confused as the party leaders and preferred to sit out the election.

The Democrats acknowledged their complete astonishment that they had been defeated in the city; it was a blow that shook them thoroughly, but they had been betrayed by those who had disposed of their votes "at the bidding of so-called leaders."⁴⁴ The *Intelligencer* pledged all of its efforts to fight the Know-Nothing order and to regain the 700 voters it accused of deserting the party in the city.⁴⁵

Aftermath of the Election

Each of the Lancaster newspapers was waiting to see how state officials would align themselves on the nativist issue; they were especially concerned with the positions of Governor Pollock, Canal Commissioner Mott and the two Representatives, Gross and North. The *Inland* announced that at least sixty of one hundred members of the Pennsylvania Assembly were Know-Nothings, but it claimed only one nativist of thirty-three members of the Senate.⁴⁶ Its estimate was probably accurate, but the other papers seemed unsure of the situation. In February of 1855, they learned the truth about North and Gross; when the party caucuses met in Harrisburg for the Senatorial election, both North and Gross attended the Know-Nothing caucus, the largest of the three. The *Intelligencer* finally admitted its misplaced confidence in them, lamented the strange company they kept, and denounced them as traitors to their party.⁴⁷

Governor Pollock's appointments were sufficient to indicate where he stood; he was diplomatic enough to try to hold together his fusion of old line Whigs and Know-Nothings, but he never renounced his Know-Nothing connections and it seems that most of his appointees were nativists. He tried to satisfy the Whigs by giving them a few positions; in fact, he apparently was ousted from a Know-Nothing lodge in Franklin County for appointing an old guard Whig to a county clerkship.⁴⁸ Pollock clearly had Know-Nothing sympathies, but many Whigs continued to claim that he was an old line Whig, supported by Know-Nothings only because they could not have elected a third party candidate. The *Inland* was no doubt correct when it replied as follows:

Every man of common sense knows that the whole country was divided between the Whigs and Democrats, and that the "American Party" is formed from materials taken indiscriminately from both. If the "American Party" never elects a man to office until it can find candidates who never were either Whigs or Democrats, it will fail of success . . . Governor Pollock is "out and out" an "American," and if those Whigs who do not belong to our party chose to vote for him, he was none the less an "American" candidate, because he re-

ceived Whig voters. Our party, in like manner, took up Mr. Mott as canal commissioner for Pennsylvania, (a Democrat) and elected him, under the assurance that he was also a Know-Nothing.⁴⁹

Know-Nothing support for Pollock, Gross and North had been justified, but they had been deceived by Henry Mott. The *Intelligencer* delighted in printing his repudiation of the Know-Nothings a month after the election, calling Mott's victory the one great Democratic triumph of 1854.⁵⁰ The *Examiner* publicly ridiculed the Know-Nothing order, by saying that it was a great tragedy to give someone you "don't know" the largest majority in the history of the state.⁵¹ Mott was the lone embarrassment to the Know-Nothings in a year of American Party triumphs.

Lancaster's Know-Nothing order spent the last two months of 1854 consolidating its strength and taking a position on the first major dispute to divide the party nationally. There was a serious argument on the national level over who should be excluded from voting and holding office in the United States. Many of the regional councils favored total exclusion of all foreigners and Catholics, while others hoped to establish tests of loyalty and exclude only the people it suspected of loyalty to another nation or to the Pope from political participation. The Know-Nothing County Committee of Lancaster met to discuss the issue in November, and it approved a statement asserting that many immigrants become loyal to the United States, and that some Catholics have no political bonds to Rome. It assured the public that Know-Nothingism in Lancaster was not designed to exclude all foreigners and Catholics indiscriminately.⁵²

By November the American party was expected to begin to take a stand on the major issues of the day, something it had avoided during the campaign. Ambiguity was important to the Know-Nothings for several reasons, and they had to be quite careful to avoid taking definite and clear-cut positions. An ambiguous position on slavery had helped them to draw support from all segments of political thought, ranging from abolitionists to conservative Democrats and Silver-Grey Whigs. The lodges were unified by a concentration on one issue, nativism—even local lodge members had varying opinions on slavery, and a unified national party was impossible if slavery was to become a primary issue. The *Inland* tried to skirt the issue by advocating that the Know-Nothing party take no official position at all on slavery:

One thing is certain—if this Know-Nothing or American party is to have a permanent organization, it must be National. The moment it becomes mixed up with the exciting sectional questions which now divide and distract the existing parties, and embitter the citizens of different portions of the Union against each other, that moment will its glory and power depart.⁵³

The *Intelligencer* spent the remainder of 1854 attacking the Know-Nothings in an attempt to break up the fusion they had put together over the nativist issues. It noted that the anti-slavery men in the order were rapidly becoming dissatisfied with its timid stand

on slavery, and it predicted the failure of the Know-Nothing fusion and the return of Democratic deserters by the next general election.⁵⁴

The Whigs and Democrats had been taken by surprise in 1854, but both parties predicted new victories in the next year's elections. Both were prepared to regroup for the coming year, and both could see that, although the Know-Nothings were strong, their support hinged on a tenuous balance of factions united only on one issue. One serious error by the Know-Nothing leadership could destroy that balance and throw the county into greater political chaos.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEMOCRATS REGAIN SUPPORT: 1855

The First Mistakes

There were to be four elections in the county in 1855, the first coming in early February. The campaign for the mayoral election in the city began in mid-January. The Know-Nothings were likely to elect a mayor if they could retain their support from October, but they were being forced to take stronger stands on the major issues of the day, and they could only do so at the risk of antagonizing some of their supporters.

In January the *Inland* made a statement in support of the tariff, attacking the Democratic party. It accused the Democrats in Congress of conspiring to demolish the tariff, a scheme, it said, that "will ruin the iron, woolen and cotton manufactories of the country in two years."¹ At the same time, in response to the fear of losing the anti-slavery vote, it ran a series of articles on the evils of slavery. It was careful, of course, not to change its official position, but three articles in particular, "Scenes in the Life of a Slaver," "A Slave-Trader's Harem," and "Native Slave-Catching" portrayed slave traders and owners as cruel and immoral men.² It is unlikely that these articles had much of an effect on the abolitionists in the Know-Nothing order, for they wanted the party to take a strong official anti-slavery position, but the *Inland* might have antagonized some of its Democratic supporters who disliked the anti-slavery slant of some of the party leaders. In order to retain Democratic support, the American party was forced to carefully avoid the issue of slavery.

The Municipal Election

As the election for mayor approached, the *Inland* again began to confine its discussions to nativist issues. In response to Democratic charges labelling the Know-Nothing platform unconstitutional, it vigorously defended nativism. The Constitution, it said, wisely

provided that only native-born citizens should hold the offices of President and Vice-President. The Know-Nothings considered their platform a logical extension of that Constitutional principle, claiming that to oppose nativism was, in essence, to oppose the Constitution.³ Nearly every week, the *Inland* published prison and poverty statistics from selected cities throughout the country, claiming them as the results of uncontrolled immigration. The week before the election, it printed the following:

Foreign Population of Pa.
303,105

Foreign Vote⁴
43,300

Pierce's Majority
19,446

The *Inland* courted legitimate support by increasing its attacks on immigration, but it also attracted new converts by adding to the aura of mystery surrounding the Know-Nothing order. It introduced "Sam" to the public. "Sam" was a fictitious character representing the typical Know-Nothing, and he was a personification of the entire Know-Nothing party. When the party would win an election, the headlines might read "Sam is Victorious." He was used to create an effect of mystery and intrigue, and his full identity was never revealed.⁵ "Sam" was apparently a common subject of discussion on the streets of the city, and it was not until after the election that the *Inland* revealed what kind of character he was supposed to be. It said that he was thought to have been in the Garden of Eden and on Noah's Ark, to have walked with John the Baptist, pointed young Luther to the Bible, brought the Bible along on the Mayflower, laid the cornerstone of the first Protestant church in America, and placed the words "Give me liberty or give me death" into the mouth of Patrick Henry.⁶ "Sam" was the mythical hero of the Know-Nothing movement, designed to capture the sympathy and imagination of the people and solicit votes for the party.

Know-Nothing Activities: March to September, 1855

Mid-1855 was certainly the most active period in the life of Lancaster's Know-Nothing party, as it was faced with a multiplicity of tasks. It had to run the city and county governments, stand by and defend the state legislature, hold together its lodges in the face of centrifugal tendencies, and participate in national, state and regional conventions designed to achieve national unity in preparation for the Presidential election of 1856. The failure of the Know-Nothing party in Lancaster County, and throughout the state, resulted largely from its failure to perform any of those functions with even a respectable degree of success.

Know-Nothing government first ran into difficulty at the state level—as early as February, the legislature was having trouble electing a senator. When it reconvened after the first two ballots, three more were taken, but Simon Cameron received a maximum of only 55 votes, eleven short of his election. Most of the Know-Nothings

stubbornly supported Cameron, but the opposition was equally determined to block his election. A motion was introduced to adjourn the meeting until October, and the anti-Cameron forces pushed it through by a vote of 66 to 65.¹⁸ In 1856, Cameron was finally elected by a coalition of Republicans and Know-Nothings, but the 1855 legislature failed to elect a senator, and the state was represented by only one senator for that year. It was a dismal failure of Know-Nothing government to perform even its most important function.

The senatorial election was only the first of many occasions for Know-Nothings government to prove its inability to act. By September it was becoming notorious for its remarkable inactivity and its unusual extravagance. The legislature bickered over financial legislation all year, producing very little new legislation. An important factor in Pollock's election in 1854 was that Governor Bigler had chartered too many banks; as governor, Pollock chartered more new banks and rechartered more old ones in one year than Bigler had in three. Old line Whigs and even a few Know-Nothings quickly became disenchanted with Pollock, but the legislature was unable to block his actions. In essence, it allowed Pollock to continue the inflationary policies of the government, contributing to the growing unpopularity of the Know-Nothings. The *Examiner* chided the *Inland* for supporting the "extravagant" policies of the administration.¹⁹ Even more zealous in its condemnations, the *Intelligencer* accused the Know-Nothings of gaining office through wild promises, then failing to act, while the economy crumbled underneath them.²⁰

The *Intelligencer* was not satisfied to simply confine its attacks to the state administration, but it sought out Know-Nothing misconduct elsewhere and gave it full coverage. In an article reprinted from the *Boston Courier*, the Know-Nothing legislature of Massachusetts was labelled the "most extravagant, the most drunken, the most impious, and the most lecherous" in the history of the state.²¹ The Know-Nothing administration in Philadelphia was a subject of frequent condemnatory remarks. Philadelphia, it was reported, had applied for a loan of 1.5 million dollars, and was in a near state of bankruptcy—"And all this in a little over nine months' rule of Know-Nothingism."²² The Democrats expressed their fear that the city of Lancaster, and the entire state, would soon be plagued by the same conditions.

Although neither the Democrats nor the Whigs seriously criticized Jacob Albright's administration until the next municipal election, they did whatever they could to expose the farcical actions of Know-Nothings in other locations. Lancaster County never suffered from the kinds of blunderings that characterized other Know-Nothing administrations, but the local party certainly was damaged by the publicity given to the state government and to other administrations throughout the country.

The most serious damage to the local American party was not caused by the failure of Know-Nothing government, but by the self-

destructive discipline of the individual Know-Nothing lodges. Lodge 42 in the Northeast Ward of the city was, perhaps, the most fanatical of all the local lodges; it is particularly enlightening to study what little is known of the occurrences inside that lodge.

The policy carried out in Lodge 42 after the Municipal election of 1855 can only be described as a purge. The lodge records, it seems, were distinguished by what they did not record, but a few facts can be ascertained. An internal struggle began when Joshua W. Jack, one of the founders of the local order, was accused of complicity in the illegal election of Christian Kieffer to the order. Jack was acquitted, but his case began a policy of strict enforcement of lodge rules. The first member to be expelled was Emmanuel C. Reigart, perhaps the wealthiest practising attorney in the city and one of the most distinguished members of the order. Several other expulsions soon followed, although there is no record of which rules were violated. At the same time, rivalries for lodge offices became bitter and heated, and soon lodge members were being expelled for supporting the losing candidates. Withdrawals from membership rapidly increased, but the purge continued.²³

A revealing entry into the minutes gives an idea of the character of the order and the kind of dissent that was becoming prevalent:

Brother Strickler R. Evarts admitted to your committee that he voted for the whole Kieffer ticket [in the Municipal election] from beginning to end, that he done [sic] all for that ticket he could, that he would do so again, and that he wont [sic], and would not be bound to support any set of men for office under such circumstances.²⁴

Evarts' case was referred to a committee which preferred charges against him, and a resolution to expell him from the order was passed.²⁵

The last expulsion recorded was that of John Wise, President of the Know-Nothing County Committee in 1854, and a man who represented the extremism, the eccentricity and the ability to ignore immigrant ancestry that characterized the Know-Nothing order. All four of John Wise's grandparents had been immigrants, and his father spoke primarily German. He was educated in both the English and German languages in grammar school, and he first read of his later career, aeronautics, in a German newspaper account of a balloon voyage. In 1836, he built his first balloon and made a highly publicized flight in Philadelphia. He returned triumphantly to Lancaster to repeat his performance, but the ropes of the balloon were cut away from the ground unevenly and he fell out as the flight began. It was a fortunate accident, for the balloon exploded a few minutes later. By 1847, he was well known throughout Pennsylvania and New York; his major project was selling the War Department on the use of balloons as weapons of war. He gave his balloons patriotic names, such as "Old America" and "Young America".²⁶

In 1854, Wise settled down and took charge of the Know-Nothing organization in Lancaster. At first, he insisted on the strict rules

of the order, but later, when the party ran into difficulty, he was the first to advocate an open organization, without secret lodges. Soon afterward he was expelled for voting for a member of the fusion ticket in the city,²⁷ although the underlying reason was probably his desire to abandon secret lodges.

Upon his expulsion, Wise again began to fly; he set a world record in 1859 that was to last until 1910—1200 miles in 19 hours, 50 minutes, ending in a crash landing. With the aid of Simon Cameron and Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania, he was appointed an army balloonist in 1861. At Bull Run, his balloon was of no use when it became caught in a cluster of trees; after it was repaired, the wind tore it from its attachment to the ground and blew it unoccupied toward enemy lines. It had to be shot down, and the army abandoned the project.²⁸

That a man as eccentric as Wise would be a spokesman for reason in the Know-Nothing order shows how extreme the movement could be. Even Wise's death was as strange as his life; he began a flight in St. Louis, was blown over Lake Michigan, and was never seen again, although the body of his companion was washed ashore.²⁹ Wise exemplified, in life and death, the Know-Nothing tendencies towards patriotic compulsion, recklessness and excessive single-mindedness.

Wise was only one of the leaders who was expelled in 1855, and the internal warfare and political intrigue of the lodges did not go unnoticed by the general public. The *Examiner* delighted in publishing every rumor about lodge purges, and Lodge 42 had no monopoly on expulsions. The most highly publicized purge was that of H. A. Rockafield, the treasurer of Lodge 21 in the Southeast Ward of the city. Rockafield was expelled for embezzling \$30 from the treasury of the lodge, and he sent his denial to the *Examiner*; in his letter, he called the Know-Nothing order a "Jesuitical Association", expressing regret for his part in its successes.³⁰

The end result of the purges of 1855, predictably, was a significant loss of membership and a considerable weakening of the party. The leaders exposed themselves as men hungry for power, even at the expense of crippling the order. By June, the Know-Nothings could no longer maintain four lodges in the city; the depleted membership of four lodges combined to form one city lodge.³¹

The desire to maintain a political party as private club, to adhere to strict secrecy and to insist upon unreasonable rules of behavior was quickly destroying the practical, politically viable aspects of Know-Nothingism.

The attempts of the Know-Nothings to organize nationally for the election of 1856 revolved around two issues. First, many nativists, like John Wise, argued that secrecy had served its purpose and should be abandoned. Second, the different views on slavery had to

be resolved to the satisfaction of Know-Nothing organizations above and below the Mason-Dixon line. The Lancaster County order actively debated those questions and participated in regional and national conventions held during the summer to resolve disagreements within the party on those issues.

The question of secrecy was a nationwide topic in 1855. Florida was the first state to abolish the Ritual and Ceremony of the party in early April, and it was to be discussed at the Grand State Council of Know-Nothings in Pennsylvania that same month. In Lancaster, the issue was first discussed by John Wise, but the local council went on record as unanimously opposed to the abandonment of secrecy, believing strongly that mystery and secrecy were sources of party power.³²

When the State Council met to discuss the issue of secrecy, the *Inland* reprinted an account of its meeting, from the New York newspapers, reporting that the meeting broke up in confusion when Simon Cameron and former Governor Johnston left in disgust over a vote to end secrecy in the lodges. The *Inland* interjected a comment claiming that no one left in disgust, but the secrecy problem seems to have split the party down the middle.³³ Lancaster County lodges adhered to secret proceedings until much later in the year.

As the summer months approached, the secrecy issue was superseded by the question of slavery, a problem involving disagreements not only in the local and state organizations, but more importantly on the national level. The Know-Nothings knew well enough that they could not survive as a party without a strong national organization; they turned to the task of building a powerful and unified national party in June of 1855.

Southern Know-Nothings opposed immigration because they considered it a threat to slavery—most foreigners disliked slavery and fought against it. The party in the South took a firm pro-slavery stand, but the Democrats attacked it for consorting with Northern abolitionists.³⁴ In the North, the Know-Nothings depended on free-soil and abolition votes; they were concerned with immigration as a threat to labor rather than to slavery. To reconcile the two views was a difficult task, but both wings of the party agreed that some national platform was necessary before 1856. They met at a national convention in Philadelphia in June of 1855, with slavery as the major topic of discussion.

When the convention met, it established a committee to formulate a platform, but the committee later reported that it was unable to reach an agreement on slavery. It announced a majority report advocating submission to existing laws on slavery, and declaring that Congress had no power, under the Constitution, to legislate on the subject, or to exclude any state from the union for accepting slavery. It denied that Congress had the power to interfere with slavery in any of the territories or in the District of Columbia. A

minority report advocated adherence to the Missouri Compromise line, 36°30", declaring that Congress should refuse to admit a slave state above that line. A vote taken on the floor of the convention sustained the majority report, prompting fifty-four delegates from twelve New England and Midwestern states to walk out of the convention.³⁵ The delegates from Pennsylvania did not secede, but most of them supported the minority report; later in the summer they discussed their official position at a statewide meeting.

The slavery clause adopted at the national convention became known as Article 12 of the Know-Nothing platform. The Pennsylvania State Council met late in July to discuss the position of the state organization. O. H. Tiffany, President of the State Council, sent a letter to each local council announcing that the State Council had repudiated Article 12; he called upon all American party members to demand concessions from the national party, to bring government back "to the purity of former days. To recall, if possible, the national spirit that animated the fathers and founders of the Republic."³⁶ Despite the great differences that separated the Northern and Southern parties on the issue of slavery, there was always that hope, expressed by Tiffany, that an intense nationalism could override the sectional interests and sustain the unity of the party and the nation.

In the same letter, Tiffany went on to argue that the Know-Nothing party was founded on the principle that each state would conduct its own political affairs and have its own views, as a state, without interfering with the politics of another state. Pennsylvania, he said, opposed the extension of slavery, the Nebraska Bill, and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise—if the American party in the state was to abandon those positions, it would lose its support. Tiffany insisted that the only resolution to the crises was for the national platform to ignore slavery, allowing each state party to formulate its own position. He concluded that Know-Nothings in Pennsylvania should fully endorse the state platform:

. . . opposed to the temporal dominion of the Pope, opposed to the corruption and debasement of the old political parties, opposed to the Nebraska bill and the extension of slavery: *This is the issue — the greatest and most pressing issue—now before the people.*³⁷

In response to the meeting of the State Council, the executive committee of the Lancaster County Know-Nothing party met on August 4, fully endorsing the actions of the State Council and pledging its support to the principles of the state platform.³⁸ The strong anti-slavery position was destined to alienate many party members who previously had been conservative Democrats.

The activities of the Know-Nothings in mid-1855 were gradually eroding the strength of the order. The local purges decreased the membership of the lodges, while the failures of Know-Nothing government and the abortive attempt to formulate a national platform left the order open to ridicule. As the election approached, the *In-*

telligencer predicted a Know-Nothing defeat and taunted the party about its state platform. It cautioned the public that the Know-Nothings were rapidly becoming pro-Negro, and that "the entire party, in a short time, will be nothing more or less than a miserable, rickety, red-mouthed Abolition faction."³⁹ Its attacks became more frequent and more vicious, and it was apparent that the Know-Nothings would be struggling for votes in October.

As much as the Know-Nothings were in danger of losing support, their troubles were small compared to those of the old line Whigs. While the Know-Nothings were worthy of frequent Democratic attacks, the Whigs were simply the butt of a joke. The Whigs met for their County Convention in July, still clinging to their unpopular mode of nominating candidates. When the meeting was convened, only twelve men were present. The first motion introduced was a resolution barring all Know-Nothings from participation in the convention. When the resolution lost by a vote of seven to five, the convention broke up in a fist fight.⁴⁰ The Whigs simply never recovered from their losses in 1854, and they continued to lose supporters throughout the year.

A final development before the election was the meeting of a Republican State Convention at Pittsburgh in September. The office of Canal Commissioner was the only major statewide office to be decided in 1855, and the convention met to make nominations. Theophilus Fenn, a Lancaster newspaper owner and cohort of Thaddeus Stevens, put forth the name of Peter Martin of Lancaster County. Fenn and Martin were both committed to the Know-Nothings, and it became clear that the Know-Nothings controlled the convention when Martin won, despite stiff opposition. Later, apparently, he deferred to the regular Know-Nothing candidate, Thomas Nicholson.⁴¹

The Election of 1855

The Democrats and Know-Nothings nominated candidates for state Assembly positions and seven county offices at regular conventions. After their first abortive attempt, the Whigs, too, managed to choose a ticket. As much as the Democrats and Know-Nothings fought in an attempt to create voter interest, participation was low, only 47.2 percent countywide. The results, however, told exactly what had happened over the summer.

The Democratic candidate for Canal Commissioner easily won the state, and lost the county by an extremely small margin.

Thomas Nicholson - Know-Nothing	5301
Arnold Plumer - Democrat	5099
Joseph Henderson - Whig	1988 ^a

The astonishingly low Whig vote was not representative of actual Whig strength in the county. Many county Whigs voted for either Nicholson or Plumer, realizing that Henderson could not possibly carry the state, but those voters returned to the Whig county ticket,

fully expecting to carry the county. Even the county election, however, was a two-way race with the Whigs lagging far behind. The Know-Nothings elected three Assemblymen, the Democrats two, while the Democrats took four of the seven county offices. The Whigs were shut out altogether.⁴³

Although the Democrats and Know-Nothings each won six offices, the average Democratic vote was 4515, to 4470 for the Know-Nothings. The Whigs, even at full strength for the county races, only averaged 3186. Actually, the Know-Nothings did not lose ground from 1854 to 1855, polling 35.3 percent in the former year, and 36.7 percent in the latter. The Democrats made significant gains, jumping from 28.3 percent in 1854 to 38.1 percent in 1855. The Whigs had always polled over 50 percent from 1842 to 1853, but they dropped to 36.4 percent in 1854 and then to 26.2 percent in 1855. It was the first time in the history of the Whig party in Lancaster that they failed to win even one office, and it was the last time they were to run a slate of candidates for a major election.⁴⁴

Although it is difficult to fully analyze the results of the election, it is certainly necessary to think in terms of a great deal of party switching. The Democratic gains probably came from two sources. Loyal Whigs who were perceptive enough to realize, after the election of 1854, that their party had no future, searched for another party. Some of them were so highly opposed to the Democrats by tradition or by political philosophy that they voted for the Know-Nothings as the only available opposition. Some, however, were too conservative to support the anti-slavery stand of the Know-Nothings, and they joined the Democratic party for reasons of political philosophy. The Democrats also regained most of the voters they had lost to the Know-Nothings in 1854; they returned to their old party either because they could not accept the anti-slavery platform of the Know-Nothings, or because of the failures of Know-Nothing government and of the attempts at national organization.

The composition of the Know-Nothing party seems to have differed greatly from its composition in 1854. In 1854 it appealed to Whigs and Democrats, but it lost most of its Democratic supporters in 1855. It held its ground in the latter year only because it compensated for its Democratic losses by attracting more members of the nearly defunct Whig party. By October of 1855, the Know-Nothing party was composed almost exclusively of former Whigs.

The results in the city support the conclusion that the Democrats had regained most of their deserters, as they regained complete control without resorting to a fusion with the Whigs:

Nicholson - Know-Nothing	828
Plumer - Democrat	1048
Henderson - Whig	102 *

The Democrats were still below their pre-1854 totals, but they did regain control by a majority vote. The 828 votes for Nicholson rep-

resented a Know-Nothing loss of over 300 votes since the Municipal election; undoubtedly those were the votes of Democrats returning to their party. The actual Whig strength in the city was nearly 300 votes, but most of them divided their votes, probably equally, between Nicholson and Plumer.

The national Whig party was dead well before 1855, but that was the year it finally succumbed in Pennsylvania. It might have survived longer in Lancaster County if it had been reasonably strong in the rest of the state, but with such a narrow base, it had no chance to maintain a significant Whig organization. The American party held its own in Lancaster in 1855, but it was in deep trouble—the failure of Know-Nothing government, the failure to create a unified national party and the loss of most Democratic supporters kept it from holding on to the majorities it had won in the Municipal and Township elections. The Know-Nothing party had reached its peak in February and March, and the October election caught it on the decline. Nativism, though popular, was simply not the pressing issue of the day. Although the Know-Nothings took a strong anti-slavery stand in 1855, the basis of the party was still nativism, and it was becoming a tiring issue. The Know-Nothings had controlled the Republican Convention, but gradually they were losing anti-slavery voters in other parts of the state, voters who saw slavery as the primary issue. The Lancaster County party, after failing to win a decisive victory in 1855, was in danger of losing the essential support of Thaddeus Stevens and the abolitionists of the county to the Republican party.

It was only the Democrats who clearly benefited from the year's political developments; they regained control of the city, won half of the county offices, and lured the voters who had deserted in 1854 back to the party. In addition, they added a sizeable number of recruits from the dying Whig party to their numbers. It was the best showing for Lancaster's Democrats since Jackson's 1467 vote majority in 1828.⁴⁶ The Democratic party did equally well throughout the state, controlling the Senate, which was not entirely up for re-election, by 17 to 16, and the Assembly, which was, by 60 Democrats to 32 members of varying opposition parties.

By mid-January, it was obvious that the election would be a referendum on Know-Nothingism; the older parties quickly realized that they could not win in a three-party race. Encouraged by the victories of fusion tickets, composed of old line Whigs and Democrats, in other cities—Pittsburgh in particular—the two parties joined also in Lancaster, confident that their combined strength was enough to defeat the Know-Nothings. They avoided the use of the word "fusion" to describe the ticket, for it had taken on a pejorative meaning in earlier elections; instead, the *Intelligencer* described it as follows:

Our Democratic friends, it appears, have deemed it inadvisable and impolitic, in the face of a powerful and unscrupulous Know-Nothing organization, to settle a distinctive party ticket; but in lieu thereof,

have agreed upon tickets, in several wards, made up of good, reliable men from both parties.⁷

Nearly two-thirds of the candidates were Democrats, but the Whig County Committee was willing to endorse the ticket and campaign in its behalf.⁸

Heading the fusion ticket was Christian Kieffer, the incumbent mayor who had served in that capacity since 1852. Kieffer was a Democrat who later tried to infiltrate a Know-Nothing lodge in the city, probably in bitterness over his defeat. He was irregularly elected to the lodge, but his election was declared a fraud and he never became a member.⁹ He was opposed by Jacob Albright, a former leader of the city Democrats, but an early member of the Know-Nothing order.

The Know-Nothing party of the city reached its peak in the 1855 Municipal election. Although the seeds of party discord had already been planted, the attraction of "Sam" and the discipline of the lodges kept the party firmly behind Albright. The Democrats and Whigs had been confident of victory, citing fusion victories in Pittsburgh and Allegheny City to prove that they were in control,¹⁰ but the Know-Nothings polled more votes in February than they had in October.

Albright - Know-Nothing	1165
Kieffer - Fusion	905 ¹¹

The *Intelligencer* tried to be optimistic in defeat, noting that Pollock had won the city by 587 votes and Albright by only 260.¹² It failed to say, however, that Pollock had received 350 votes from old line Whigs who recognized him as the regular Whig candidate, while in the Municipal election the same old line Whigs supported the fusion. In October, the Know-Nothings had won only 50 percent of the vote, compared to 56 percent in February. They swept all of the offices except one, losing to the incumbent alderman by six votes.¹³

The Know-Nothings seemed strong and unified after the Municipal elections, but their image was to suffer before the next county elections. They now had the record of the state legislature to defend, and it was running into difficulty in performing its first task, the election of a senator. Simon Cameron, who had quickly abandoned the Democratic party in 1854, was nominated in the Know-Nothing caucus. A few of the Know-Nothing legislators, however, refused to support him. In February, two ballots were taken, with Cameron polling 58 and 59 votes respectively, but 66 were needed to win. After those two ballots, the anti-Cameron forces adjourned the meeting for two weeks.¹⁴ The early failure to elect a senator had an effect on the image of the Know-Nothing party.

The Township and School Board Elections

The Township elections were held in March as the counterpart

to the Municipal election in the city. There was no newspaper campaign and very little coverage of the elections, but the *Inland* did carry a summary of the results. Each borough and township had its own fusion ticket running against the Know-Nothings, but the results were similar to those in the city in February. Despite the fact that the combined Democratic-Whig vote in the 1854 general election had far exceeded the Know-Nothing vote, most of the localities went to the Know-Nothings in March. Of the twenty-three boroughs and townships holding elections, seventeen elected the Know-Nothing tickets, six went for the fusion tickets.¹⁵

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of the total county vote, since figures were printed in the *Inland* for only those townships which gave the Know-Nothings majorities ranging from 65 to 75 percent. An accurate estimate would probably show a county-wide Know-Nothing majority of 50 to 55 percent. It is likely, however, that the lodges, with their strict discipline, managed to get all of their members to the polls, while interest for these rather unimportant elections was probably rather low among Democrats and Whigs. Nevertheless, the Know-Nothings certainly had not lost ground since October, and probably they had made significant gains.

The visible decline of the American party began in May with the elections for School Directors in the city. It was only a minor election, characterized by low voter interest and no newspaper campaign, but the results were highly publicized by the Democrats and Whigs. The Democratic-Whig fusion became known as the People's ticket, which carried the names of some of the city's most prominent Democrats; of the twelve People's candidates, two were physicians, three were attorneys, two were prominent public officials, and one was a wealthy surveyor.¹⁶ The Know-Nothing ticket simply could not compare; they ran several laborers, a blacksmith, a builder and other men of similar occupational and educational status.¹⁷ From that standpoint, it is no surprise that the People's ticket elected eleven of its twelve candidates and averaged 695 votes to 589 for the Know-Nothings. That the Know-Nothings were defeated in the city, where they were originally strongest, is important, but even more significant is the fact that the lodges failed to get out the vote. Something had happened to the strict discipline which had kept lodge members in line through two elections. The Know-Nothing party was losing its grip, and it is necessary to turn to the developments inside and outside of the lodges to explain why.

CHAPTER 5

NATIVISM SHOVED ASIDE: 1856

The Republicans Move In

After the election of 1855, each party began its chaotic preparation for the Presidential election of 1856. In January, the

Intelligencer began to devote its columns to the glorification of James Buchanan. Its spirits were high: fresh from a local victory, the Democratic party in Lancaster was unified and solidly behind Buchanan. Furthermore, the favorite son of the county seemed to have the inside track on the nomination. Never had the opposition seemed so divided and disorganized; the Democrats knew that the South was solid, and that resistance in the North was divided between Know-Nothings, old line Whigs, and the emerging Republican party. Even as early as January, there seemed to be little doubt about the outcome of the November election.

There had been no Republican party in Lancaster County in 1855, but several Republicans had been elected to the state legislature from other counties. In January, the Know-Nothings met in caucus with the Republicans in Harrisburg to organize the opposition. The Know-Nothings, however, were no longer in control, as they had been in September, for they had failed to retain control of the state government. Furthermore, it was apparent that it would be difficult to organize and unite opposition sentiment around the Know-Nothings, because the remaining old line Whigs bitterly hated them for destroying the Whig party. The Republicans, therefore, firmly controlled the joint caucus, passing resolutions declaring their opposition to slavery and their determination that Kansas and Nebraska be admitted only as free states.¹ To hold the caucus together, they then passed two other resolutions—opposition to political Romanism and foreign interferences, and advocacy of modified naturalization laws.² Later in the year, the same caucus called for a joint state convention (see page 82) to nominate candidates for state offices, but the leadership of the Know-Nothing party, realizing that the Republicans would be in control, refused to commit themselves until after a Know-Nothing meeting had been held to discuss the political situation.³

In Lancaster City, the Municipal election was held in February solely between the Democrats and Know-Nothings. The Whigs announced in January that there would be no Whig nominees, and there was not yet a Republican organization in the area.⁴ The Know-Nothings remained strong in the city, surprisingly strong considering that the party was gradually giving way to the Republicans in most of the state, but Jacob Albright was too weak to defeat the candidate of a regenerated Democratic party, John Zimmerman:

Albright - Know - Nothing	934
Zimmerman - Democrat	1140

The Northwest Ward gave the Know-Nothings a few offices, but the Democrats regained the city administration by winning three of five seats on the Select Council, thirteen of fifteen on the Common Council, and nine of the fourteen other offices.⁵

The Township elections, held in April, resulted in a three-way split between Know-Nothings, Democrats and old line Whigs quite

similar to the percentages in the October election.⁶ The early days of 1856 actually were stagnant ones for local politics; there was, as yet, no Republican party, and nothing was really to change until the old guard Whigs decided who to support.

The *Examiner*, meanwhile, proved to be a die-hard Whig paper, holding together the remaining Whigs in the county and hoping for a miraculous return to the old guard. Its articles denounced both the Republicans and the Know-Nothings, declaring that neither party could successfully run a national candidate. It also urged that a Whig State Convention be held to unite all factions under true Whig principles.⁷ The Know-Nothings could never hope to capture the votes of the remaining old line Whigs, for the *Examiner* blamed them for destroying the Whig party. In fact, as late as May, it seemed possible that the *Examiner* might simply refuse to support any party and any candidate for President.

While the Whigs were trying to instigate a return to the Whig party, the Know-Nothings were trying to hold on to the anti-slavery vote. Their positions on slavery in 1855 had lost them the Democratic voters who had previously supported them, and their future hinged on their ability to suppress the growing Republican party and retain control of the anti-slavery vote. Everything depended on the Presidential candidates of the two parties.

The fate of Know-Nothingism in Lancaster, and in all of the state, was decided at the Republican Convention in Pittsburgh and the Know-Nothing Convention in Philadelphia, both meeting on February 22, 1856. The Republicans nominated John C. Fremont on a free-soil platform, but the Know-Nothing Convention was again dominated by the South. There was a sincere effort made to reconcile sectional differences when Article 12 was changed to support the Missouri Compromise, along with a strong warning that a state's internal affairs were sacred, but the free-soilers in the party were not appeased.⁸ The nomination of Millard Fillmore, a former Whig President, was unacceptable to most Northern Know-Nothings, as was the continued emphasis on nativism as the primary issue; they again withdrew from the convention, supporting Fremont.⁹

Although Lancaster County's representative to the Know-Nothing Convention, Walter G. Evans, did not withdraw, the results of the meetings were to prove disastrous to the local organization. The *Intelligencer* reported rather accurately that old guard Whigs would refuse to support Fillmore because he was a Know-Nothing, that the free-soil Know-Nothings would find him unacceptable on slavery and would support Fremont, and that even the most loyal and committed nativists had reservations about him because his nomination was controlled by the South.¹⁰ The Know-Nothing organization in Lancaster was doomed; it was forced either to abandon its party identity and support Fremont or to support Fillmore and lose the free-soil vote to the Republicans, leaving the party with only a small core

of committed nativists. It postponed the decision for several months, waiting for the state organization to act, but it prepared to campaign for Fillmore.

The *Examiner* still controlled a fourth of the voters of the county, and after the nominations were made, it began its deliberations on who to support. It was a difficult decision for the Whigs to make, for they were firmly committed to the old party, and no decision was made until late in June, four months after the nominations. On June 18, the *Examiner* praised Buchanan for his conservatism and common sense, hinting that it might support him. The next week, June 25, it published a long article carefully weighing the issues between Buchanan and Fremont, then announcing that because Buchanan denied the sovereign powers of Congress over the territories, it would support Fremont. From that point on, the *Examiner* and the *Intelligencer* resumed their traditional rivalry, virtually ignoring Fillmore and the Know-Nothings.

Lancaster County was unusual in that its political changes were taking place very slowly. There was no Republican party until after the nominations for President had been made, although Thaddeus Stevens had been waiting to take the lead in the new party for some time. A group of hard-core Know-Nothings were organizing to campaign for Fillmore even though he could never win the state, and while the Whigs finally supported Fremont, they were careful to maintain their separate Whig identity. The *Examiner* supported Fremont and the Union State ticket, which was the state affiliate of the national Republican party, but it insisted that the county ticket be called a fusion between the Union party and the Whig party.¹¹ The conservative nature of the county was evident in the late development of the Republican party and in the efforts of Whigs and Know-Nothings to revive their parties and maintain separate identities despite the situation on the state and national levels. The same conservatism had caused the county to cling to the Antimasonic party until 1843, long after it had disappeared elsewhere—it was a peculiar, though not exclusive, trait of Lancaster County.

The Campaign of 1856

In August, the Know-Nothings of the state held a meeting to discuss whether or not to join the Republicans in support of Fremont. It was attended by die-hard nativists who refused, by a vote of 72 to 18 to support Fremont, and the representatives returned to their counties to campaign for Fillmore.¹² The *Intelligencer* was delighted with the results of the meeting, for the Democrats greatly feared a united opposition. It announced with pleasure that:

The Fillmore men of this city and many parts of the County are determined to keep up their organization, and, so far, positively refuse any affiliation with the Black Republican Woolly Horse faction.¹³

On the county level, the Know-Nothings failed to run a separate ticket. Thaddeus Stevens, Theophilus Fenn and many other

Know-Nothings with anti-slavery views had switched to the Republican party shortly before the conventions, and they took charge of the Union ticket in the county. They were able to convince the Know-Nothings that it would be futile to oppose them on the county level, so the Union ticket achieved a complete fusion of Republicans, Whigs and Know-Nothings in the county. The Union State ticket was also a fusion—the statewide Know-Nothing party agreed to support it despite its bitterness over losing most of its support to the Republicans.¹⁴ In Lancaster, the *Examiner* became the spokesman for the Union ticket, and Thaddeus Stevens, long the antichrist of county Whigs, became its new hero.

One major theme saturated the newspapers for months before the election; the entire campaign was based on the sectional issue—union or disunion. The *Intelligencer* positively asserted that only one man, Buchanan, could save the Union, and it accused the *Examiner* of secretly favoring disunion.

The editor has chosen to make his bed with the Black Republicans and Disunionists of the county, and there we are disposed to let him lie, with all the odium which must attach itself to his character as a politician. He has attempted to sell the old line Whigs of Lancaster County to THADDEUS STEVENS and his co-workers in abolition iniquity The object of the Free Soil, Abolition, Black Republican movement, disguise their intentions as they may, is a dissolution of the Union.¹⁵

Article after article carried by the *Intelligencer* emphasized those same charges. Every other issued was passed over as petty and irrelevant.

The *Examiner* was also willing to face the issue, declaring that the election of Buchanan would quickly result in disunion. It asserted that Fremont's principles were identical to those of old line Whigs—against slavery but for the rights of the South, and in favor of union over disunion.

That the election of FREMONT would, in its consequences, allay sectional agitation, no man can doubt. The Republican party and its candidate are "inflexible in the belief that slavery ought not to be interfered with where it exists under the shield of State Sovereignty [sic]."¹⁶

Throughout the campaign, each paper continued to claim that union would be an exclusive consequence of the election of its man; similarly, both ignored Fillmore as a serious contender, concentrating on the Buchanan-Fremont contest.

The Union ticket in the county ran several former leaders of the Know-Nothing party for office; a few of them were still members of the order, placed on the ticket as a condition for Know-Nothing support, but most of them had become Republicans. Anthony E. Roberts, the Know-Nothing Congressman, ran for reelection on the Union ticket as a firmly committed Republican and an early supporter of Fremont. His eagerness to switch parties came as no

surprise, for he had been a follower of Thaddeus Stevens since he first entered politics as an Antimason in the 1830's. His voting record in Congress was heavily pro-Republican and, like Stevens, he had used the Know-Nothing party as a transition until the public was ready for a party based on the slavery issue.¹⁷ His Democratic opponent was Isaac Hiester, the man who had opposed him as a Whig in 1854. Hiester's pro-slavery views naturally propelled him towards the Democratic party, and he had taken some of his supporters with him. The Union ticket was oriented heavily to former Know-Nothings and many former old line Whigs, but the Democratic ticket also carried the names of former Whigs, like Hiester, and a few former Know-Nothings.¹⁸

Although the *Examiner* insisted that it was still a Whig paper, it was apparent, a few weeks before the election, exactly how far it had strayed from its former principles and how difficult it would be to recapture them. It was supporting the same men it had vigorously denounced two years before, the men who had operated rival papers, the *Independent Whig* and the *Inland Weekly*. It also supported Anthony Roberts against Isaac Hiester, exactly the reverse of its position only two years before. David Wilmot, a Congressman from western Pennsylvania, former Democrat and sponsor of the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, had received violently adverse publicity in the *Examiner* for over ten years, but when he spoke in Lancaster for the Union ticket in 1856, it hailed him as a hero. Finally, it was supporting a ticket composed of several former Know-Nothings. It had gone much too far to ever return to pure Whiggery, and it was to remain a Republican paper, insuring the unity of the Republican party after 1856.

The Election of 1856

The Presidential election was thought, by many, to hinge on the results in Pennsylvania. Buchanan was certain to get 112 electoral votes from the South, and Fremont was likely to get as many from the North. Pennsylvania had 27 electoral votes, and although it was Buchanan's home state, it was quite possible that he could be beaten by a fusion for either Fillmore or Fremont. If Buchanan were to lose Pennsylvania, it was thought, the election would be thrown into the House of Representatives; by the October elections, however, it appeared that Fremont and Fillmore would split the opposition vote.¹⁹

The October elections tested the fusion theory, since the Know-Nothings were supporting the Union State ticket. The election resulted in a statewide Democratic victory, but by only 51 to 49 percent, or 3000 votes out of 432,000.²⁰ Encouraged by the close vote, the Republicans attempted another fusion, proposing that only one opposition ballot be printed, carrying the names of both Fremont and Fillmore, with electoral votes to be cast according to the per-

centages of the ballots cast for each candidate.²¹ This impractical scheme quickly fell through, however, virtually assuring Buchanan's victory in the state. The stubborn support of Pennsylvania Know-Nothings for Fillmore, as small a faction as they had become, prevented the opposition from seriously challenging Buchanan.

In Lancaster County, voter participation was high for the October election, over 70 percent, and it resulted in a Union victory. The voting in the city and county for major offices went as follows:

		City	County
Canal Commissioner	Scott - Democrat	1666	8029
	Cochran - Union	1085	10473
Auditor	Fry - Democrat	1682	8067
	Phelps - Union	1069	10421
Congress	Hiester - Democrat	1698	8320
	Roberts - Union	1031	10001 ²²

The Democrats, after their victories in 1855, again lost the county, but they gained in percentage of the vote. They jumped from an average of 38.1 percent in 1855 to 44.1 percent, an increase of nearly 16 percent in two years. The 6 percent increase from 1855 to 1856 probably came from Whigs who were too conservative to vote Republican. As the Know-Nothings party gave way to the Republican party, the old line Whigs were finally forced to decide which major party to support. Ultimately, the situation aided the Democrats, who were able to hold on to their supporters through the years of Know-Nothing rule and gain, in addition, a large number of conservative Whigs.

In the Presidential election, Buchanan, despite his advantage as a favorite son, did little better than the Democratic ticket had done in the October election. He did, however, easily win the county and the state by defeating a divided opposition. The decline of the Know-Nothing party in both the city and county is, perhaps, the most interesting result of the election:

	City	County
Buchanan - Democrat	1893	8731
Fremont - Republican	697	6608
Fillmore - Know - Nothing	332	3615 ²³

The Know-Nothings dropped from a high of 36.7 percent of the vote in 1855 to 19.1 percent in 1856. The loss of Democratic supporters in 1855 and of abolition and free-soil supporters in 1856 completed the transformation of the party into nothing more than a small nativist faction. Fillmore's defeat in every state except Maryland ended all hopes for a unified national Know-Nothing party. Although nativism continued to be a political force of some consequence in the county after 1856, the election was to be the last organized effort of the Know-Nothing party in Lancaster County.

In the city, the demise of nativism was even more complete

than in the rural areas. From a maximum of 56.2 percent of the vote in the Municipal election of 1855, the Know-Nothings dropped to an astonishingly low total of 11.3 percent. Nativism remained strong in the city after 1856, but it was never again truly powerful politically.

The year 1856 dealt the final blows to both the Whig and Know-Nothing parties in Lancaster County. Unwilling to die quietly, the Whigs called for a party revival early in the year, but finally succumbed to the pressures created by the Know-Nothings and Republicans on the one hand, and the failure of their national party on the other. The Know-Nothings, meanwhile, lost the abolition vote to the Republicans, and with it went their political future. Thaddeus Stevens and his followers had joined the lodges in 1854, having no future in the Whig party, but they found the Know-Nothings unresponsive to their demand that slavery become the major issue. When the Know-Nothings nominated Fillmore, the anti-slavery vote went automatically to Fremont. In the confusion resulting from rapid changes in party politics, it was ultimately the Democrats who benefited from the death of the Whigs and the Know-Nothings.

It is absolutely necessary to end a discussion of the year 1856 with a word on the Republican, or Union, party. The Know-Nothing party had been a temporary home for liberal Whigs who were in disfavor with the party organization. By uniting with the nativists, they helped to speed the complete destruction of the Whig party, and they emerged from the Know-Nothing party in 1856 as the natural leaders of the opposition to the Democrats. The voters who followed them in 1856 were former Whigs, along with a very few Democrats, who were gradually radicalized by the increasingly bitter sectional clash; they were weary of subordinating the most important issue of the day to nativism. The radicals of 1850 became the leaders of 1856 primarily because they squarely faced the central issues of the day. It was men like Stevens who benefited from the short-lived Know-Nothing party. Embittered by the actions of the Whig organization in removing him from Congress in 1852, he used the Know-Nothing party by throwing his weight behind it and destroying the Whig majority in the county. He then used the Know-Nothings as a transition stage until he was able to emerge from it as the leader of the Republicans. Stevens never ran for office as a Know-Nothing; rather, he waited behind the scenes until the sectional conflict had increased the popularity of his radically anti-slavery views. He then resumed his seat in Congress in 1858, beginning his illustrious career as a Congressional radical.

CHAPTER 6

AN ANALYSIS OF KNOW-NOTHINGISM

Why Nativism?

The strength of the Know-Nothing party in Lancaster County

was determined by several factors, both national and local. A primary cause was the intense desire to escape the sectional conflict, to find an issue to replace slavery as the basic political concern of the day. Sectional hostility had already ruined the Whig party and it was reaching a peak over Kansas and Nebraska; it was hoped that an issue could be found that would ease sectional tensions and focus the energy of politics on nationalism. The nature of that issue was determined by the real and serious political, social and economic concerns of the people. Immigration, naturalization, pauperism and crime were problems that had concerned the people for years, and the Know-Nothing party directed them into a political movement. Fear of those problems, whether they were real or imagined, caused the people of the 1850's to embrace nativism, to blame every problem from sectional tension to inflation on foreigners and Catholics.

The statistical data does not always coincide with what was feared by the people, but most parts of the nation were affected by some of the problems and conditions that led to nativism. Although immigration was lighter in the South than in the North, the Southern states had many Irish Catholics, and southerners blamed the rises in pauperism on the Catholics in particular.¹ The 1850 census only confirmed what they had already seemed to know, that over 50 percent of the paupers in the nation were foreign-born, or that one of every thirty-three foreigners was a pauper, compared to one of every three hundred natives.² In some areas immigration was less important than an increase in naturalization, which was giving votes to the Democrats, and wherever the Catholic population was heavy, nativism was rampant among opponents of the Democrats.³ In Pittsburgh, the German Protestants frequently joined the Native Americans to express their anti-Catholic fears, and from 1850 to 1852 an anti-Catholic party ran a ticket in the city's elections.⁴ Given the national attention to nativism, even one problem caused by foreigners or Catholics in any location could precipitate a nativist movement.

In Lancaster County, the nativists concentrated on immigration, which was reaching peak levels in the midnineteenth century. From 1845 to 1849, there were 902 immigrants who entered the county, an increase of 86 percent over the previous five years. The following five-year period, 1850 to 1854, was the nineteenth century's heaviest period for immigration into the county, with 1056 foreigners arriving.⁵ The alarming increase in immigration, which continued at nearly the same pace for several years, was a major cause of nativist sentiment in the county.

The increase in immigration had social and economic effects which were found primarily in the city; of the 2106 immigrants coming to the county from 1850 to 1859, 1564, or 74 percent, settled in the city.⁶ The result of a dramatic increase in immigration was the failure of the city to substantially improve the economic welfare of its citizens. Economic records were kept in terms of five

classes of citizens in the 1800's; they ranged from Class 1, composed of laborers earning less than \$80 per year, to Class V, prominent attorneys, judges, merchants and public officials earning over \$1000 per year. In 1830, 53.2 percent of working men in Lancaster were in Class I, but as economic conditions and wages improved, Class I became smaller—it held 33.8 percent of the workers in 1837, 25.0 percent in 1847. After 1847, the tremendous increases in immigration reversed the trend of gradual progress, and in 1857 there was 28.0 percent of the work force in Class I.⁷ Similarly, the trend to greater percentages of citizens in Classes III, IV, and V was reversed from 1847 to 1857. The total percentage of the work force in these classes was 5.2 percent in 1830, 7.6 percent in 1837, and 15.4 percent in 1847. By 1857, it had dropped off to 15.2 percent.⁸

Since pauperism actually declined in Lancaster after peak years from 1845 to 1849, the economic statistics probably indicate that jobs were available, but at a depressed wage rate which retarded economic progress.⁹ The Know-Nothings regularly complained of low wages, urging that manufacturers hire natives and pay higher wages, and arguing that such a course of action would benefit the industry of the county in the long run. Undoubtedly, there was a substantial reason for nativist fear of immigration in Lancaster; all considerations of inflation aside, the lot of the common native laborer was not improving, and the problem was cheap foreign labor. Inflation, however, was also a problem, and it was fanning the fire of discontent. All of the major newspapers of the county ran articles throughout the early 1850's lamenting rapidly increasing prices. Low wages and inflation were primary factors which prompted normally Democratic laborers to join the Know-Nothing party in 1854.

Political considerations also caused Lancastrians to support Know-Nothingism, since along with the remarkable increase in immigration came a similar increase in naturalization. Heavy rates of naturalization began in 1850, coinciding with the increase in immigration which began in 1845. From 1850 to 1854, 1056 foreigners became naturalized citizens, an increase of 58 percent over the previous five-year period.¹⁰ The Democratic leaders did not object to the increases in Democratic voters, but part of the Know-Nothing appeal to opposition voters, former Whigs, was the Know-Nothing desire to limit naturalization by a residence requirement of twenty-one years.

It was the increases in foreign-born population and vote which determined the strength of the Know-Nothing movement in Lancaster. In other areas, poverty, crime and religious fears played major roles in nativist movements, but that was not the case in Lancaster. The *Inland* would, from time to time, publish statistics from Pittsburgh, Philadelphia or New York on crime or poverty, but it could not support its claims by using local statistics. Even during the peak years of Know-Nothingism, there was no anti-Catholic agitation in Lancaster, for the Catholic population was extremely small.

By 1860, there were only four Catholic churches in the county with a total membership of 3400, or 3.9 percent of the population, compared to 7.2 percent statewide.¹¹ The only religious agitation in the county was anti-Methodist;¹² the Methodist church was officially opposed to nativism, and it represented 25.0 percent of the county population—the Methodists were large enough to attack, but the Catholic faction was too small to worry about.¹³

All of the factors leading to nativism were not present in Lancaster, and even the major factor, immigration, affected only the city and a few small towns. Yet there were certainly perceptible reasons for nativism, and rural Whigs were prone to fear foreign interferences as much as their city counterparts. The real fears of foreigners and the social and economic effects of immigration triggered nativism, but the Know-Nothing party was also attractive, in both the urban and rural atmospheres, because the secrecy of the lodges held a certain mystical attraction. The popularity of the Know-Nothing party can be attributed to a combination of substance and myth, just as its actions reflected both the practical and puerile aspects of politics.

Who Joined the Know-Nothing Order?

The Know-Nothing order was essentially a temporary fusion among men of varying party affiliations united only on one issue. There were three basic sources from which the party drew its strength. First, there were many city Democrats and some from the rural towns, most of them poor and forced to work with immigrant labor at a depressed wage, although a few of them, like Gross and North, were Cameron Democrats dissatisfied with the party organization. Another source was the traditional Whig; attracted by the nativist issue and convinced that the Whig party had no future, many Whigs jumped to the Know-Nothing party in 1854 or 1855. The final source was the Stevens branch of the Whig party—free-soilers and abolitionists unable to function within the conservative Whig organization. Many of them, like Emmanuel C. Reigart and Anthony E. Roberts, had followed Stevens in 1843 as pure Antimasons, and had gravitated afterwards into various third parties. Later, they formed the backbone of the Republican party.

It has been possible to determine previous party affiliations for twenty-seven of the leaders of the Know-Nothing party in the county in 1854. Fifteen were former Whigs of various political philosophies, eight had been Democrats, three had belonged to the Native American party and one to the Temperance party. Probably, Know-Nothing Democrats were outnumbered by at least two to one in the county by former Whigs and Native Americans. In the city lodges, however, the Democrats were probably equal in number to the opposition voters of previous years; three of the eight Democrats among party leaders were from the city, compared to four of the eighteen Whigs and Native Americans.

The Know-Nothings were also composed of men of various religious backgrounds, but to the exclusion of Catholics and probably of most Methodists. It has been possible to determine the religions of sixteen of the thirty-two most important city leaders. Seven were Presbyterian, seven Lutheran, one Episcopal and one Reformed. It is likely that those four denominations provided the vast majority of Know-Nothings, perhaps with a scattering of a few more fundamentalist religions in the rural areas of the county.

The religious backgrounds of Know-Nothings in Lancaster, most likely, were similar to those in other parts of the nation. The Presbyterian religion was always a strong exponent of Know-Nothingism along with the Lutheran religion and most other major Protestant denominations.¹⁴ Methodist literature throughout the nation was anti-nativist, often supporting Catholicism, but some individual Methodists were members of the order. The spokesman for the party in Tennessee was a Methodist minister, and other Methodist clergymen were prominent members of the order in the South.¹⁵ It is not unlikely, then, that despite official publications attacking the Methodists, the Know-Nothings in Lancaster received some support from members of that church, the largest single denomination in the county.¹⁶

In terms of occupation and wealth, it is difficult to find a clear formula for determination of party affiliation. From the names of the wealthiest men in the county, it has been possible to identify nine Know-Nothings, six Democrats and five old guard Whigs. The Whigs were strongest in the farming areas where land-owning wealth rarely came into contact with poor immigrants. The farmers disliked slavery but were conservative by nature and preferred to remain with the old party as long as possible. The Know-Nothings drew their support from the city and from rural towns, converting former Whigs who did come into contact with immigrants, the manufacturers, lawyers and some artisans. They also gained heavy support from urban laborers in 1854, because the laborers suffered most from immigration. The Democrats held on to the support they had traditionally gotten from merchants, traders and some professional men; their losses in 1854 to the Know-Nothings were urban laborers, but by 1855, most of them returned to the Democratic party.

Nativism was able to solidify a coalition between the rich and the poor in Lancaster city and in the rural towns in 1854. It cut into both Democratic and Whig support, unifying widely varying political philosophies. The wealthy Whigs who came into contact with immigrants and who feared the vote of naturalized citizens were quick to abandon their party for the Know-Nothings. For that reason, the Whig party rapidly died in the city, while it lingered on in the rural areas of the county long after the 1854 election. Nativism appealed also to poor Democrats, but they were driven out of the Know-Nothing party in 1855 by its strong anti-slavery posi-

tion. When they returned, the Democratic party became a powerful force in the county, winning the 1855 election. The concentration on one popular issue alone allowed the Know-Nothings to combine so many elements of society into one political party, but that issue gave way to more pressing concerns in 1855, and the Know-Nothings gradually lost their convenient coalition.

The Nativists After 1856

Nativism was no longer a political asset after 1856, and many prominent Lancastrians, especially those with any further political aspirations, firmly denied having been connected with the Know-Nothing party.¹⁷ Yet nativism did not die after 1856; there were those who firmly adhered to its principles long after its days of political viability. A Native American headquarters was maintained above the Slaymaker-Reigart liquor store in Lancaster, and the management of that store, active politically during the days of Know-Nothing popularity, bravely supported nativism for years.¹⁸

In 1857, Isaac Hazlehurst ran as a Native American candidate for Governor, and Lancaster County nativists ran a full slate of candidates. Since most former Know-Nothing leaders had joined the Republicans in 1856, the Native Americans of 1857 were devoid of respected leaders. They polled only 444 votes in the city, 19.6 percent, and 1236 votes in the county, 8.0 percent.¹⁹ Their membership was limited to hard-core nativists, men who could not see that slavery was the major issue of the times. They were the remnants of a once powerful Know-Nothing party, unwilling to admit that the Republicans had taken over.

The 1857 election, predictably, went to the Democrats in the city and the Union ticket in the county; the Democrats, however, gained 42.1 percent of the vote in the county, and won the state, defeating David Wilmot for Governor.

	City	County
David Wilmot - Union	531	7699
William Packer - Democrat	1251	6486
I. Hazlehurst - Native Amer.	444	1236 ²⁰

In 1858 and 1859, Lancaster County returned to the two-party system, with the Republicans clearly drawing most of the Native American vote and gaining some room to breathe. Thaddeus Stevens went to Congress by a vote of 9513 to 6340 in 1858, and the Republicans were gradually assimilated into the Republican party in those two years, but in 1860 a small group of nativists supported Bell and Everett as the Presidential ticket. Bell polled 253 votes in the city, a creditable 9.5 percent of the vote, but he only managed 441 votes in the county, a dismal 2.2 percent.²¹ The 1860 vote was the last can victory in 1859 was even larger. Most of the remaining nativists visible remnant of nativism in Lancaster County elections, but the few remaining nativists were almost religious in their support of long outmoded beliefs and doctrines.²²

Just as the Know-Nothing party had drawn support from many political backgrounds in 1854, its demise sent lodge members to almost as many new political organizations. Some returned to the Democratic party, most gravitated into the Republican party, and a few remained committed to nativism. What is most striking in the aftermath of Know-Nothingism, however, is the great number of political leaders who disappeared entirely from the political scene in Lancaster. Of more than one hundred Know-Nothings who were either members of the County Committee or candidates for office, only about twenty ever ran for office again. Three former Know-Nothing leaders ran on the Native American ticket in 1857, but two of them later ran as Republicans. Four Know-Nothing leaders later appeared on Democratic tickets, and ten ran as Republicans. Political retirement seems to have been a common fate of most of the leaders of the party, with the exception of the followers of Thaddeus Stevens who became quite active after 1856.

Of those who did not retire, a few Democrats followed the lead of Simon Cameron and David Wilmot and became Republicans, but most Know-Nothings of Democratic extraction in Lancaster returned to the Democratic party. Hugh M. North, the man who embarrassed the Democrats by running for and winning a legislative seat in 1854, then voting with the Know-Nothings, ran again as a Democrat in the 1860's. Know-Nothings of Whig extraction gravitated into the Republican party; radicalized by the Kansas-Nebraska Act or a few years later by the Dred Scott decision and other national issues, they found themselves following new leaders and a new party. The real political dilemma was that which befell the most conservative of the old guard Whigs. They refused to associate with the Know-Nothings and found themselves philosophically distant from the Republicans, but they were also bitterly opposed, by tradition, to the Democrats. Stranded without a party in mid-1856, many of them followed the lead of Isaac Hiester and bolted to the Democrats. The gradually increasing Republican vote after 1857 indicates that most of the old line Whigs were gradually being converted to the anti-slavery views of the Republican party, switching back to oppose the Democrats.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

The Know-Nothing party was a serious national power in the 1850's, for it achieved almost unchecked power in Kentucky and Maryland, provided stiff opposition in other Southern states, and, through fusions with Whigs, as in Pennsylvania, or free-soilers as in several Northern and Midwestern states, it captured a number of statehouses and state legislatures in 1854 and 1855.¹ In Lancaster County, it swept into power through a burst of energy, but as radical reform movements sometimes do, it coasted after having gained the

power. It was perhaps insignificant, in the final analysis, as a political force, but it was an important and necessary transition between Lancaster's conservative Whig party and the Republican party which emerged in 1856.

A peculiarly favorable set of circumstances allowed the small Native American party of the 1840's to begin a new movement on the same principals in 1854 and swell into a strong Know-Nothing party so quickly and decisively. It could not have done so without the underlying social problems of the county, problems involving economic growth and political control which were affected by a large increase in immigration. Immigration created the first set of conditions favorable to nativism—depression of wages and a large body of recently naturalized citizens with the right to vote. Anti-foreign agitation elsewhere came to the attention of Lancastrians and added to the existing fears and beliefs.

The other condition most favorable to Know-Nothingism was the demise of the Whig party from 1850 to 1853. Local Whigs maintained undisputed control of the county, but they were faced with collapse without and dissent within. The Compromise of 1850 had destroyed Whiggery in the South, and it had driven Northern Whigs into conservative, liberal, nativist and even temperance factions.

The Know-Nothing party offered many advantages to many different kinds of people in 1854, while the Whig party was in a position to offer very little. It was a method for the Stevens branch of the Whig party to get revenge and power, to topple the old organization from without after failing to reform it from within. It capitalized on the fears and angers of the workers resulting from immigration—nativism was simply a popular issue in 1854. Old line Whigs were willing to join either because they were nativists, or because they perceived the inevitable failure of their own party. Finally, the Know-Nothings capitalized on the tendencies of the people to join secret and ritualistic orders. Such orders had become the vogue after the Antimasonic party gave way to the Whigs; from 1841 to 1847, Lancaster County's involvement in fraternal orders rapidly increased, as the Odd Fellows, the Improved Order of Red Men, and the Patriotic Order of Sons of America all formed local lodges.² At least ten leaders of the local Know-Nothing party were masons, working and meeting with the most zealous of the old Antimasons of the county.³ The many attractions of the party, along with sole concentration on one issue, created a temporary fusion of some of the most unlikely groups to ever work for a single cause.

Know-Nothing success in 1854 can be attributed to both the ability to unite widely varying factions and the secrecy which ultimately confused and embarrassed the Whigs and the Democrats. They were able to create unwanted fusions by waiting until the major parties had nominated candidates and by supporting those candidates who were secretly members of the order. In addition, the

rigid rules of the order were enforceable in the early months of its existence, and it was able to get out the vote and defeat the Whigs even in the three way race for Congress. Unity, secrecy and obedience carried the Know-Nothings to victory in that year.

Once the Know-Nothings came to power, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, they were not the radicals they had seemed to be. They became known, if fact, for their inaction and bickering. A few nativist bills were introduced in Pennsylvania, but they were never acted upon, and the legislature failed even to elect a senator in 1855. In Maryland, Kentucky, and other Southern states, the powerful Know-Nothings were also unable or unwilling to pass nativist bills.⁴ In terms of their election promises, the Know-Nothings failed dismally in most areas, and in all other terms, their record was not at all distinguished.

In Lancaster the party had difficulty defending the Know-Nothing legislative record, was losing support from both sides for its rather peculiar stand on slavery, and was destroying the lodges from within by purging the membership. After the national convention in 1855, it was clearly in trouble. The 1855 election prompted a significant return to the Democratic party, although the Know-Nothings managed to hold on by gaining votes from a deteriorating Whig party.

In most of the North, the Know-Nothings quickly gave way to the Republican party in 1856. In the South, they were overwhelmed by the Democrats.⁵ They had been able to hold on to local footing through the previous two years, but the election of 1856 was to be fought over national issues, causing increased sectional antagonism. Sectional hostility favored the development of sectional parties, and the Know-Nothings were unable to campaign on their own terms. Pennsylvania in general, and Lancaster County in particular, was caught in the middle of the sectional rivalry. Lancaster was far behind other areas of the North in the development of anti-slavery sentiments, so the Know-Nothing party was able to hold out against the Republicans and split the opposition vote in 1856. The Lancaster County Know-Nothing party died with its counterparts in other areas of the North, but it died more slowly, helping to throw the county and the state to Buchanan as it went. It lost its abolition support and held the middle ground in 1856, gradually losing more voters as the sectional controversy radicalized the people.

The politics from 1854 to 1856 in Lancaster County involved rapid changes in public opinion, heavy party switching, great fluctuations in the primary issues, in the party leaders and in the fortunes of the political parties themselves. After the election of 1855, *Intelligencer* looked back at the previous year with great relief:

Never before were such violent and tremendous changes in public opinion. In the first named year [1854], by a combination of all the fanatical isms and disturbing elements of society, by appeals to

popular passion and prejudice, the democratic party of the country was buried under the weight of such terrible adverse majorities that it seemed literally "crushed out" The public mind has had time to revive from its political distemper. The paroxysm of passion and prejudice which caused it to cut such absurd political tantrums has passed away, leaving the patient in a more reasonable and reflecting condition. The future historian will always set down the result of the election of 1854 to a species of political lunacy which was prevalent in the land, and which for a time threatened the direct consequences to the peace of the country.⁶

The *Intelligencer* felt a sense of near tragedy in 1855, for it greatly feared the Know-Nothings. There certainly was an aspect of lunacy in the movement, a bigotry that unrealistically blamed all of the woes of the nation on foreigners and Catholics. There was also an element of escapism, a need to resolve the sectional conflict by desperately trying to ignore its existence. Know-Nothingism was an eccentric combination of practical politics carried on through the most impractical means, mystery and secrecy, and of exaggerated attacks reflecting an unthinking prejudice.

The Democrats had good reason to condemn the Know-Nothings in Lancaster, but it is not easy to look back now and condemn them completely, for the Know-Nothing party was a valuable and sometimes reasonable part of the county's political development. Nativism was a response to real and significant social and economic conditions caused primarily by unregulated immigration. The Know-Nothings were certainly overzealous, but most reform movements are formed from radical beginnings, and immigration and naturalization reforms were needed. Many of the immigration and naturalization reforms advocated by the Know-Nothings were incorporated in later years into Federal law.⁷

The Know-Nothing movement was a positive force also in the respect that it made a serious attempt to lessen sectional antagonism. It did so first by drawing attention to another issue, and later by holding national conventions to find a common position on slavery. In 1855, the party in Lancaster followed the lead of the rest of the North and condemned Article 12 of the Know-Nothing platform, but that was understandable considering its contents. In 1856, a hard core of nativists in the state and county fully supported Fillmore and the modified national platform; although doomed to failure by increasing sectional antagonisms, the remaining Know-Nothings held the middle ground in 1856, seriously hoping that a platform supporting the Missouri Compromise line and warning against interference with slavery where it existed in the states would resolve the conflict.

Most importantly, the Know-Nothing party in Lancaster County was a transition party; members of a dying Whig party were unwilling to follow the lead of radical antislavery men in 1854, but by 1856 they had come to the point where they could. It was the Know-Nothings who filled the political vacuum created by the demise of

the Whig party and who prepared former Whigs for new leadership as gradual radicalization of the people took place. It was a vehicle for restructuring the political system around the vital issue of slavery, a process that simply failed to materialize under the old leadership. Know-Nothingism, as radical and bigoted as it often was, was a legitimate response to existing pressures in both the political and the social systems. Its primary concerns were soon forgotten amidst the sectional clash, but the new leadership and the new political affiliations it created became the basis for the Republican party.

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